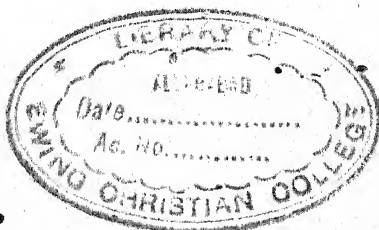


# SIX SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

EDITED BY

R. C. & N. GOFFIN



OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS

SIX SHORT BIOGRAPHIES



*First printed 1933*

*Second impression 1934*

*Third impression 1935*

*Fourth impression 1936*

Printed in British India by N. Mukherjee, B.A., at the Art Press  
20, British Indian Street, Calcutta and Published by  
Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, Calcutta.

## PREFACE

THE short essay in biography is one of the pleasing fashions of modern English literature. Lives portrayed at fuller length have always of course occupied a place of honour in the hierarchy of letters and particularly in the make-up of history—so Bacon enumerates the kind in his marshalling of the human sciences: Carlyle speaks of history as the essence of innumerable biographies. But the short and sophisticated personal memoir is rather peculiarly a modern development, and repays study as a special kind of its own.

One thing is certain; that the subject of any great biography, whether impressionistic or full length, must be a 'character', no mere human euphoist; another, that the 'little necrology' at any rate is concerned only with what is characteristic of the subject. We feel indeed inclined to question whether in this class A. C. Benson's ruling that the impression must be 'faithful' is a true criterion. Perhaps we can explain what we mean by referring to the memories we have of our own lives. Most of us look back over long dreary *insignificant* years; we remember only the significant happenings, and even these we remember haphazard, probably not at all in chronological order, nor in the order of their apparent mundane 'importance'. The tiniest of accidents may have become real incidents to us, events—escapes of the truly 'us'—while long wasted passages of time may be traversed in retrospect, as

## PREFACE . .

they were travelled in time, and spell no personal meaning, nothing really relevant to what we feel were our real selves.

So to scan the course of other people's lives, and to penetrate through the insignificant to the significant—surely this is the truer criterion of the 'short biography' as an order in literature. A memoir which shows this imaginative vision does give the 'whole' life, and not 'one aspect only'; but it works from the core to the circumference, seizing the character, and then dramatizing for us just those scenes where the chosen actor may fulfil his role. The stage directions to this synoptic drama may be arresting, the more brilliantly arresting the better we are pleased, but it is the success of the dramatist's 'character-act' which counts most. This gives the piece its authenticity; we look up from our reading and say: 'We know this man.'

To suit the scope of the present volume some of the selected biographies have been slightly abridged.

N.G.

R.C.G.

*Caversham*

*Whitsuntide 1933*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE publisher's thanks are due to : The Royal Society of Literature for permission to reprint ' The Art of the Biographer ' by A. C. Benson from *Essays by Divers Hands* (Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom), vol. VI, 1926 ; Mr. Augustine Birrell for ' Milton ' from his *Obiter Dicta* ; Messrs. Chatto & Windus for the essay on Hume from *Portraits in Miniature* by Mr. Lytton Strachey ; Messrs. Ivor Nicholson & Watson for the essay by Mr. J. L. Hammond on ' Richard Cobden ' from *The Great Victorians* ; Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd. for the essay on R. L. Stevenson from *Critical Kit-Cats* by Edmund Gosse ; Mr. Charles Williams for his essay on Macaulay from *Biographical Studies*.



## CONTENTS

PREFACE

v

### INTRODUCTION :

THE ART OF THE BIOGRAPHER	A. C. BENSON	I
I JOHN MILTON	AUGUSTINE BIRRELL	II
II JONATHAN SWIFT	W. M. THACKERAY	43
III DAVID HUME	LYTTON STRACHEY	73
IV LORD MACAULAY	CHARLES WILLIAMS	85
V RICHARD COBDEN	J..L. HAMMOND	103
VI R. L. STEVENSON	EDMUND GOSSE	119
NOTES		145



## INTRODUCTION

### THE ART OF THE BIOGRAPHER

THERE is a very beautiful and not, I think, very well known poem by Rossetti,<sup>2</sup> written in his first fine direct manner, of which I will quote the first two stanzas. It is put in the mouth of a lover who stands before the portrait, painted by himself, of his beloved; she is dead and lost to him, and he says :—

This is her picture as she was :

It seems a thing to wonder on,

As though mine image in the glass

Should tarry, when myself am gone.

I gaze until she seems to stir,—

Until mine eyes almost aver

That now, even now, the sweet lips part

To breathe the words of the sweet heart :—

And yet the earth is over her.

Alas, even such the thin-drawn ray

That makes the prison-depths more rude,—

The drip of water night and day

Giving a tongue to solitude ;

Yet only this, of love's whole prize,

Remains ; save what in mournful guise

Takes counsel with my soul alone,—

Save what is secret and unknown

Below the earth, above the skies.

These two lovely verses comprise what is at once the problem and the hope of the biographer ; the hope, that



## THE ART OF THE BIOGRAPHER

the memory of something fine and beautiful and beloved should be so recorded, that it may stand as a living witness to life and beauty, and the problem, how to do this; how to concentrate in a few pages of a printed book a true and faithful impression of something exquisite and lovable, or even it may be of something interesting, salient and striking. The question is if it can be done fairly and sincerely at all, because it is not a single attractive aspect, but a presentment of the *whole* of a nature and character that is desired. Then, too, we have to consider the enormous amount of material that has to be selected from in the case of a man, let us say, who has lived an active life—the affairs in which he has been engaged, the interviews, the conversations, the personalities he has affected, or been affected by, the letters he has received and written. The biographer has to give an impression of all this, if he can, and to preserve the real proportion, not merely to show his hero in brilliant glimpse and in triumphant moments, but to show what he was in trouble, in anger, in grief, in exhaustion. It cannot be done in any sort of completeness; it must be a miracle of selection and balance. I am sure that it is by far the greatest of all artistic problems; and I am sure, too, that the art of biography is only in its quite elementary stages, as compared with any similar art.

The first and by far the greatest difficulty of the biographer lies, it must frankly be said, in the way in which humanity at present regards death. We suppose ourselves to believe in immortality, but in practice we hardly seem to believe in it at all. The future existence of the spirit has no sense for us of actual and vital

. A. C. BENSON

continuance. If we believe that the spirit survives, we must be in doubt as to whether, when the machinery of thought is gone, the memory can survive. I have a friend who received a blow on the head in an accident, and has never been able to recover any recollection whatever of the month which preceded the accident; and yet if memory does not survive, identity seems hardly to deserve the name, if all experience is forgotten. The sudden arrival of bodily death to an active and vivid personality is so stunning and bewildering a thing to his immediate circle, that it seems to change their whole view of the departed. The house where his voice and step are heard no more, the unused books, the vacant chair, the dropped pen—all this gives a rude shock to affection; but the result too often is that the character of the departed is instantly invested in sacredness and solemnity. It seems irreverent to remember anything absurd or amusing about him; his very gaiety and cheerfulness is as fuel to sorrow. Then the biographer begins his work, and the moment that he writes freely and naturally, touches upon faults or frailties or foibles or tricks or tempers or moods, or above all absurdities, there is a chorus of disapproval. The piety of relatives, which is a real and true thing and must be respected, fires up at the bare idea of the hero being represented in an unjust or irascible or perverse or ridiculous light. Then, too, the roseate light of romance begins to shed its glow over their admiring memories. Further, the choice has to be made as to whether the thing is done at once, while memories are fresh and interest vivid, or whether it is all to be deferred to some judicious date, when the

## THE ART OF THE BIOGRAPHER

*grand*  
glowing picture has faded into something dim and stately. It ends as a rule in the thing being done soon and then everything is smoothed out, the salient features softened down, the contrast sacrificed, the proportion lost. This is the great, initial and supreme difficulty of biography, the fact that a biographer is confronted with passionate emotion and intense hero-worship. It is the old conflict between realism and romance. Most human beings are deeply in love with romance, and prefer a figure to be idealized; and until people learn that if a man is great enough to be written about, he is also great enough to be described clearly, accurately and with relentless fidelity, biography must continue to be a tame, reticent, sentimental and insincere art. I, personally, could not conceive desiring to be romantically depicted. If my life were to be portrayed at all, I should desire my faults, failings and absurdities to be accurately recorded. But, as a rule, sentimental admirers do not seem to consider what would be their hero's wish at all. They look upon him as helpless and defenceless. They do not desire either truth or proportion; they desire a glowing and glorified figure moving on from strength to strength, when the interchange of strength and weakness, of lofty beauty and childish pettiness are often the chief interest of a man's career.

*Considered*  
*They can do what they want!*  
I do not mean for an instant that I desire a caricature, with what is picturesque, salient, and even grotesque unduly emphasized. What I desire is contrast and proportion. *lidi.*

Again there is another great problem of biography with which hardly anyone has as yet attempted to *that good & best*

A. C. BENSON

grapple. Biographies are, as a rule, confined to persons of notable performance. That seems to me an altogether inartistic business. There are a good many people who sacrifice personality to performance, put all their energy into their work, whatever it is, and perhaps achieve great results, with the result that they have little left to give to life. Such lives should be drily and historically treated, as a contribution rather to history than to biography. But besides this there are a good many vivid and charming people, who have given themselves freely in all directions, but have not displayed high technical accomplishment in any field. Such men and women have inspired deep emotions, have loved intensely, have cast a glow upon the lives of a large circle, have said delicate, sympathetic, perceptive and suggestive things, have given meaning and joy to life, have radiated interest and charm. But such as these are hardly ever written about, simply because the difficulties are so great. Their talk with all its quick and glancing effects has never been recorded, their glances and gestures, so unforgettably beautiful, can hardly be rendered in words. Yet I believe that these people are often best worth remembering, because they have shown what we all most need to feel—the beauty and significance of life. Our belief in sheer tangible performance is a rather uncivilized thing; or rather our disdainful neglect of what is merely beautiful and delightful is a dull and barbarous thing.

The perfect biographer must see his subject, visibly, audibly and tangibly; he must paint, not what he thinks he sees, but what he actually does see. Let me

## THE ART OF THE BIOGRAPHER

make that point clear.\* A great artist said to me the other day that in picture-making, the difference between the amateur and the professional is that the amateur paints, knowing mentally what he is painting—a house, a tree, a figure, a face. He reasons about it, he interprets it. But the true artist, as said my friend, could paint a thing just as well upside-down. He does not reason about it; it is to him just a matter of shapes and colours and spaces; it is the mind of the man who looks at the picture which interprets it—the painter has nothing to do with interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

That, then, is the business of the biographer—he must have a relentless and microscopic faculty of observation; he must have patience, energy and research; he must have a power of omission and selection; and lastly he must have an extreme veraciousness, which does not pay any particular heed to decorum or sentiment or romance. He need not violate privacy or sacredness, any more than a portrait painter need insist on always painting from the nude; but he must have no deference for the kind of hero-worship which requires that a man should be exhibited in flawless, stainless and radiant perfection, while his sympathy and reverence will save him from mere caricature and from undue emphasis on what was merely occasional, exaggerated or sensational. Proportion is the true difficulty, how to balance what is lofty, noble and awe-inspiring with what is minute, whimsical, humorous. Even what, as Rossetti beautifully said, 'is secret and unknown, below the earth, above the skies,' must, if not told, at least be able to be inferred. Great and lofty spirits do not always say all that they

A. C. BENSON

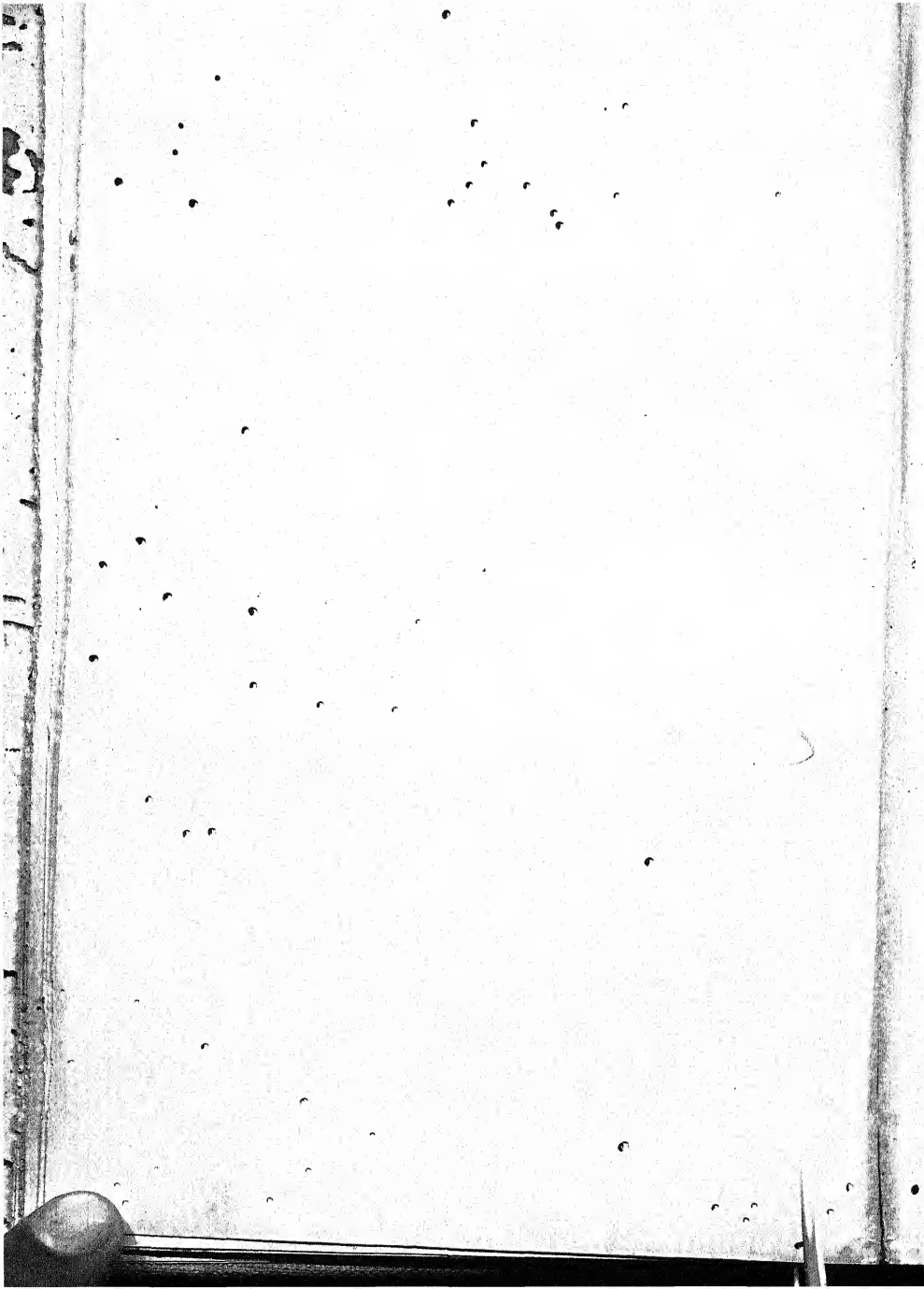
feel ; their silence often says more than their speech ;  
and even the biographer must be able to hint these  
august and inspiring silences. We do not always know  
what we love in others ; what they do is often but a  
small part of what they are ; yet from a hundred  
delicate hints and glimpses we come to believe in what  
they are, while at the same time our deepest love is  
never given to those who are wholly remote, <sup>away from concrete</sup> abstracted  
and passionless. We do not love men and women in  
spite of their faults, prejudices, <sup>peculiarities, modes of thought, & conduct</sup> mannerisms and foibles  
but actually for them, because they all proceed out of  
what they are ; and therefore the best biographer must  
know by a kind of inspired tact what is essential ; he  
must not love fondly but truly ; and then if he works  
both faithfully and skilfully, he may do what is perhaps  
the greatest service a man can do for his fellows, and  
persuade them to believe in life, and show them that  
life itself finely lived, with all its <sup>own failures</sup> shadows and failures,  
is a more beautiful and engrossing thing than any  
romantic or imaginative presentment of it.

A. C. BENSON



JOHN MILTON





## I. JOHN MILTON

(1608-1674)

It is possible to dislike John Milton. Men have been found able to do so, and women too; among these latter his daughters, or one of them at least, must even be included. But there is nothing sickening about his biography, for it is the life of one who early consecrated himself to the service of the highest Muses, who took labour and intent study as his portion, who aspired himself to be a noble poem,<sup>2</sup> who, Republican though he became, is what Carlyle called him, the moral king of English literature.<sup>3</sup>

Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, on the 9th of December, 1608. This is most satisfactory, though indeed what might have been expected. There is a notable disposition nowadays, amongst the meaner-minded provincials, to carp and gird at the claims of London to be considered the mother-city of the Anglo-Saxon race, to regret her pre-eminence, and sneer at her fame. In the matters of municipal government, gas, water, fog, and snow, much can be alleged and proved against the English capital, but in the domain of poetry, which I take to be a nation's best guaranteed stock, it may safely be said that there are but two shrines in England whither it is necessary for the literary pilgrim to carry his cockle hat and shoon<sup>4</sup>—London, the birthplace of Chaucer, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Milton, Herrick, Pope, Gray, Blake, Keats,

## JOHN MILTON

and Browning, and Stratford-upon-Avon, the birth-place of Shakespeare. Of English poets it may be said generally they are either born in London or remote country places. The large provincial towns know them not. Indeed, nothing is more pathetic than the way in which these dim, destitute places hug the memory of any puny whipster of a poet who may have been born within their statutory boundaries. This has its advantages, for it keeps alive in certain localities fames that would otherwise have utterly perished. Parnassus has forgotten all about poor Henry Kirke White,<sup>5</sup> but the lace manufacturers of Nottingham still name him with whatever degree of reverence they may respectively consider to be the due of letters. Manchester is yet mindful of Dr. John Byrom.<sup>6</sup> Liverpool clings to Roscoe.<sup>7</sup>

Milton remained faithful to his birth-city, though, like many another Londoner, when he was persecuted in one house he fled into another. From Bread Street he moved to St. Bride's Churchyard, Fleet Street; from Fleet Street to Aldersgate Street; from Aldersgate Street to the Barbican; from the Barbican to the south side of Holborn; from the south side of Holborn to what is now called York Street, Westminster; from York Street, Westminster, to the north side of Holborn; from the north side of Holborn to Jewin Street; from Jewin Street to his last abode in Bunhill Fields. These are not vain repetitions if they serve to remind a single reader how all the enchantments of association lie about him. Englishwomen have been found searching about Florence for the street where George Eliot represents Romola<sup>8</sup> as having lived, who have admitted never

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

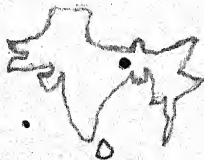
having been to Jewin Street, where the author of *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost* did in fact live.

Milton's father was the right kind of father, amiable, accomplished, and well-to-do. He was by business what was then called a scrivener, a term which has received judicial interpretation, and imported a person who arranged loans on mortgage, receiving a commission for so doing. The poet's mother, whose baptismal name was Sarah (his father was, like himself, John), was a lady of good extraction, and approved excellence and virtue. We do not know very much about her, for the poet was one of those rare men of genius who are prepared to do justice to their fathers. Though Sarah Milton did not die till 1637, she only knew her son as the author of *Comus*, though it is surely a duty to believe that no son would have poems like *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in his desk, and not at least once produce them and read them aloud to his mother. These poems, though not published till 1645, were certainly composed in his mother's life. She died before the troubles began, the strife and contention in which her well-graced son, the poet, the dreamer of all things beautiful and cultured, the author of the glancing, tripping measure—

Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest and youthful jollity—

was destined to take a part, so eager and so fierce, and for which he was to sacrifice twenty years of a poet's life.

The poet was sent to St. Paul's School, where he had excellent teaching of a humane and expanding character



## JOHN MILTON.

and he early became, what he remained until his sight left him, a strenuous reader and a late student.

Or let my Lamp at midnight hour  
Be seen on some high, lonely tower,  
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear.<sup>9</sup>

Whether the maid who was told off by the elder Milton to sit up till twelve or one o'clock in the morning for this wonderful Pauline realized that she was a kind of doorkeeper in the house of genius, and blessed accordingly, is not known, and may be doubted. When sixteen years old Milton proceeded to Christ's College, Cambridge, where his memory is still cherished; and a mulberry-tree, supposed in some way to be his, rather unkindly kept alive. Milton was not a submissive pupil; in fact, he was never a submissive anything, for there is point in Dr. Johnson's malicious remark,<sup>10</sup> that man in Milton's opinion was born to be a rebel, and woman a slave.

But in most cases, at all events, the rebel did well to be rebellious, and perhaps he was never so entirely in the right as when he protested against the slavish traditions of Cambridge educational methods in 1625.

Universities must, however, at all times prove disappointing places to the young and ingenuous soul, who goes up to them eager for literature, seeing in every don a devotee to intellectual beauty, and hoping that lectures will, by some occult process—the *genius loci*—initiate him into the mysteries of taste and the storehouses of culture. And then the improving conversation, the flashing wit, the friction of mind with mind,—these are looked for, but hardly found; and

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

the young scholar groans in spirit, and perhaps does as Milton did—quarrels with his tutor. But if he is wise he will, as Milton also did, make it up again, and get the most that he can from his stony-hearted stepmother before the time comes for him to bid her his *Vale, vale, et aeternum vale.*<sup>11</sup>

Milton remained seven years at Cambridge—from 1625 to 1632—from his seventeenth to his twenty-fourth year. Any intention or thought he ever may have had of taking orders he seems early to have rejected with a characteristic scorn. He considered a state of subscription to articles a state of slavery, and Milton was always determined, whatever else he was or might become, to be his own man. Though never in sympathy with the governing tone of the place, there is no reason to suppose that Milton (any more than others) found this lack seriously to interfere with a fair amount of good solid enjoyment from day to day. He had friends who courted his society, and pursuits both grave and gay to occupy his hours of study and relaxation. He was called the 'Lady' of his college, on account of his personal beauty and the purity and daintiness of his life and conversation.

After leaving Cambridge Milton began his life, so attractive to one's thoughts, at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, where his father had a house in which his mother was living. Here, for five years, from his twenty-fourth to his twenty-ninth year—a period often stormy in the lives of poets—he continued his work of self-education. Some of his Cambridge friends appear to have grown a little anxious, on seeing one who had distinction stamped upon his brow, doing what the

## JOHN MILTON

world calls nothing ; and Milton himself was watchful, and even suspicious. His second sonnet records this state of feeling :

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year !  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew' th.

And yet no poet had ever a more beautiful springtide, though it was restless, as spring should be, with the promise of greater things and 'high midsummer pomps'.<sup>12</sup> These latter it was that were postponed almost too long.

Milton at Horton made up his mind to be a great poet—neither more nor less ; and with that end in view he toiled unceasingly. A more solemn dedication of a man by himself to the poetical office cannot be imagined. Everything about him became, as it were, pontifical, almost sacramental. A poet's soul must contain the perfect shape of all things good, wise, and just. His body must be spotless and without blemish, his life pure, his thoughts high, his studies intense. There was no drinking at the 'Mermaid'<sup>13</sup> for John Milton. His thoughts, like his joys, were not those that are in widest commonalty spread.<sup>14</sup> When in his walks he met the Hodge<sup>15</sup> of his period, he is more likely to have thought of a line in Virgil than of stopping to have a chat with the poor fellow. He became a student of the Italian language, and writes to a friend :

I, certainly, who have not merely wetted the tip of my lips in the stream of these (the classical) languages, but in



## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

proportion to my years have swallowed the most copious draughts, can yet sometimes retire with avidity and delight to feast on Dante, Petrarch, and many others; nor has Athens itself been able to confine me to the transparent waves of its Ilissus, nor ancient Rome to the banks of its Tiber, so as to prevent my visiting with delight the streams of the Arno and the hills of Faesulae.<sup>16</sup>

Now it was that he, in his often-quoted words written to the young Deodati,<sup>17</sup> doomed to an early death, was meditating 'an immortality of fame', letting his wings grow and preparing to fly. But dreaming though he ever was of things to come, none the less, it was at Horton he composed *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*, poems which enable us half sadly to realize how much went and how much was sacrificed to make the author of *Paradise Lost*.

After five years' retirement Milton began to feel the want of a little society, of the kind that is 'quiet, wise, and good', and he meditated taking chambers in one of the Inns of Court, where he could have a pleasant and shady walk under 'immemorial elms',<sup>18</sup> and also enjoy the advantages of a few choice associates at home and an elegant society abroad. The death of his mother in 1637 gave his thoughts another direction, and he obtained his father's permission to travel to Italy, 'that woman country, wooed not wed',<sup>19</sup> which has been the mistress of so many poetical hearts, and was so of John Milton's. His friends and relatives saw but one difficulty in the way. John Milton the younger, though not at this time a Nonconformist, was a stern and unbending Protestant, and was as bitter an opponent of His Holiness the Pope as he certainly



## JOHN MILTON.

would have been, had his days been prolonged, of His Majesty the Pretender.

There is something very characteristic in this almost inflamed hostility in the case of a man with such love of beauty and passion for architecture and music as always abided in Milton, and who could write :—

But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloisters' pale,  
And love the high embow'd roof,  
With antique pillars massy-proof,  
And storied windows richly dight,  
Casting a dim, religious light.  
There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced quire below,  
In service high and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into ecstasies,  
And bring all heaven before my eyes.<sup>20</sup>

Here surely is proof of an aesthetic nature beyond most of our modern raptures ; but none the less, and at the very same time, Rome was for Milton the 'grim wolf'<sup>21</sup> who, 'with privy paw, daily devours apace'. It is with a sigh of sad sincerity that Dr. Newman<sup>22</sup> admits that Milton breathes through his pages a hatred of the Catholic Church, and consequently the Cardinal feels free to call him a proud and rebellious creature of God. That Milton was both proud and rebellious cannot be disputed. Nonconformists need not claim him for their own with much eagerness. What he thought of Presbyterians we know, and he was never a church member, or indeed a church-goer. Dr. Newman had admitted that the poet Pope was an unsatisfactory

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Catholic; Milton was certainly an unsatisfactory Dissenter. Let us be candid in these matters. Milton was therefore bidden by his friends, and by those with whom he took counsel, to hold his peace whilst in Rome about the 'grim wolf', and he promised to do so, adding, however, the Miltonic proviso that this was on condition that the Papists did not attack his religion first. 'If anyone,' he wrote, 'in the very city of the Pope attacked the orthodox religion, I defended it most freely.' To call the Protestant religion, which had not yet attained to its second century, the orthodox religion under the shadow of the Vatican was to have the courage of his opinions. But Milton was not a man to be frightened of schism. That his religious opinions should be peculiar probably seemed to him to be almost inevitable, and not unbecoming. He would have agreed with Emerson,<sup>23</sup> who declares that would man be great he must be a Nonconformist.

There is something very fascinating in the records we have of Milton's one visit to the Continent. A more impressive Englishman never left our shores. Sir Philip Sidney<sup>24</sup> perhaps approaches him nearest. Beautiful beyond praise, and just sufficiently conscious of it to be careful never to appear at a disadvantage, dignified in manners, versed in foreign tongues, yet full of the ancient learning—a gentleman, a scholar, a poet, a musician, and a Christian—he moved about in a leisurely manner from city to city, writing Latin verses for his hosts and Italian sonnets in their ladies' albums, buying books and music, and creating, one cannot doubt, an all too flattering impression of an English Protestant. To travel in Italy with Montaigne<sup>25</sup> or

## JOHN MILTON.

Milton, or Evelyn or Gray, or Shelley, or, pathetic as it is, with the dying Sir Walter, is perhaps more instructive than to go there for yourself with a tourist's ticket. Old Montaigne, who was but forty-seven when he made his journey, and whom therefore I would not call old had not Pope done so before me, is the most delightful of travelling companions, and as easy as an old shoe. A humaner man than Milton, a wiser man than Evelyn—with none of the constraint of Gray, or the strange though fascinating, outlandishness of Shelley—he perhaps was more akin to Scott than any of the other travellers; but Scott went to Italy an overwhelmed man, whose only fear was he might die away from the heather and the murmur of Tweed. However, Milton is the most improving companion of them all, and amidst the impurities of Italy, 'in all the places where vice meets with so little discouragement, and is protected with so little shame,' he remained the Milton of Cambridge and Horton, and did nothing to pollute the pure temple of a poet's mind. He visited Paris, Nice, Genoa, Pisa, and Florence, staying in the last city two months, and living on terms of great intimacy with seven young Italians, whose musical names he duly records. These were the months of August and September, not nowadays reckoned safe months for Englishmen to be in Florence—modern lives being raised in price. From Florence he proceeded through Siena to Rome, where he also stayed two months. There he was present at a magnificent entertainment given by the Cardinal Francesco Barberini<sup>26</sup> in his palace, and heard the singing of the celebrated Leonora Baroni. It is not for one moment to be supposed

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

that he sought an interview with the Pope, as Montaigne had done, who was exhorted by His Holiness 'to persevere in the devotion he had ever manifested in the cause of the Church'; and yet perhaps Montaigne by his essays did more to sap the authority of Peter's chair than Milton, however willing, was able to do.

It has been remarked that Milton's chief enthusiasm in Italy was not art, but music, which falls in with Coleridge's dictum,<sup>27</sup> that Milton is not so much a picturesque as a musical poet—meaning thereby, I suppose, that the effects which he produces and the scenes which he portrays are rather suggested to us by the rhythm of his lines than by actual verbal descriptions. From Rome Milton went to Naples, whence he had intended to go to Sicily and Greece; but the troubles beginning at home he forewent this pleasure, and consequently never saw Athens, which was surely a great pity. He returned to Rome, where, troubles or no troubles, he stayed another two months. From Rome he went back to Florence, which he found too pleasant to leave under two more months. Then he went to Lucca, and so to Venice, where he was very stern with himself, and only lingered a month. From Venice he went to Milan, and then over the Alps to Geneva, where he had dear friends. He was back in London in August 1639 after an absence of fifteen months.

The times were troubled enough. Charles I, whose literary taste was so good that one must regret the mischance that placed a crown upon his comely head, was trying hard, at the bidding of a priest, to thrust Episcopacy down Scottish throats, who would not have

## JOHN MILTON.

it at any price. He was desperately in need of money, and the House of Commons (which had then a *raison d'être*) was not prepared to give him any except on terms. Altogether it was an exciting time, but Milton was in no way specially concerned in it. Milton looms so large in our imagination among the figures of the period that, despite Dr. Johnson's sneers,<sup>28</sup> we are apt to forget his political insignificance, and to fancy him curtailing his tour and returning home to take his place amongst the leaders of the Parliament men. Return home he did, but it was, as another pedagogue has reminded us,<sup>29</sup> to receive boys 'to be boarded and instructed'. Dr. Johnson tells us that we ought not to allow our veneration for Milton to rob us of a joke at the expense of a man 'who hastens home because his countrymen are contending for their liberty, and when he reaches the scene of action vapours away his patriotism in a private boarding-school'; but that this observation was dictated by the good Doctor's spleen is made plain by his immediately proceeding to point out, with his accustomed good sense, that there is really nothing to laugh at, since it was desirable that Milton, whose father was alive and could only make him a small allowance, should do something, and there was no shame in his adopting an honest and useful employment.

To be a Parliament man was not part of the ambition of one who still aspired to be a poet; who was not yet blind to the heavenly vision; who was still meditating what should be his theme, and who in the meantime chastised his sister's sons, unruly lads, who did him no credit and bore him no great love.

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

The Long Parliament met in November 1640, and began its work—brought Strafford<sup>30</sup> to the scaffold, clapped Laud into the Tower, Archbishop though he was, and secured as best they could the permanency of Parliamentary institutions. None of these things specially concerned John Milton. But there also uprose the eternal Church question, 'What sort of Church are we to have?' The fierce controversy raged, and 'its fair enticing fruit', spread round 'with liberal hand', proved too much for the father of English epic.

He scrupled not to eat  
Against his better knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, he commenced pamphleteer, and between May 1641 and the following March he had written five pamphlets against Episcopacy, and used an intolerable deal of bad language, which, however excusable in a heated controversialist, ill became the author of *Comus*.

The war broke out in 1642, but Milton kept house. The 'tented field'<sup>32</sup> had no attractions for him.

In the summer of 1643<sup>33</sup> he took a sudden journey into the country, and returned home to his boys with a wife, the daughter of an Oxfordshire Cavalier. Poor Mary Powell was but seventeen, her poetic lord was thirty-five. From the country-house of a rollicking squire to Aldersgate Street, was somewhat too violent a change. She had left ten brothers and sisters behind her, the eldest twenty-one, the youngest four. As one looks upon this picture<sup>34</sup> and on that, there is no need to wonder that the poor girl was unhappy. The poet, though keenly alive to the subtle charm of a woman's

## JOHN MILTON,

personality, was unpractised in the arts of daily companionship. He expected to find much more than he brought of general good fellowship. He had an ideal ever in his mind of both bodily and spiritual excellence, and he was almost greedy to realize both, but he knew not how. One of his complaints was that his wife was mute and insensate, and sat silent at his board. It must, no doubt, have been deadly dull, that house in Aldersgate Street. Silence reigned, save when broken by the cries of the younger Phillips<sup>35</sup> sustaining chastisement. Milton had none of that noble humanitarian spirit which had led Montaigne long years before him to protest against the cowardly traditions of the school-room. After a month of Aldersgate Street, Mrs. Milton begged to go home. Her wish was granted, and she ran back to her ten brothers and sisters, and when her leave of absence was up refused to return. Her husband was furiously angry; and in a time so short as almost to enforce the belief that he began the work during the honeymoon, was ready with his celebrated pamphlet, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce restored to the good of both sexes*. He is even said, with his accustomed courage, to have paid attention to a Miss Davies, who is described as a very handsome and witty gentlewoman, and therefore not one likely to sit silent at his board; but she was a sensible girl as well, and had no notion of a married suitor. Of Milton's pamphlet it is everyone's duty to speak with profound respect. It is a noble and passionate cry for a high ideal of married life, which, so he argued, had by inflexible laws been changed into a drooping and disconsolate household captivity, without refuge or



## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

redemption. He shuddered at the thought of a man and woman being condemned, for a mistake of judgment, to be bound together to their unspeakable wearisomeness and despair, for, he says, not to be beloved and yet retained is the greatest injury to a gentle spirit. Our present doctrine of divorce, which sets the household captive free on payment of a broken vow, but on no less ignoble terms, is not founded on the congruous, and is indeed already discredited, if not disgraced.

This pamphlet on divorce marks the beginning of Milton's mental isolation. Nobody had a word to say for it. Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Independent held his doctrine in as much abhorrence as did the Catholic, and all alike regarded its author as either an impracticable dreamer or worse. It was written certainly in too great haste, for his errant wife, actuated by what motives cannot now be said, returned to her allegiance, was mindful of her plighted troth, and, suddenly entering his room fell at his feet and begged to be forgiven. She was only nineteen, and she said it was all her mother's fault. Milton was not a sour man, and though perhaps too apt to insist upon repentance preceding forgiveness, yet when it did so he could forgive divinely. In a very short time the whole family of Powells, whom the war had reduced to low estate, were living under his roof in the Barbican,<sup>36</sup> whither he moved on the Aldersgate house proving too small for his varied belongings. The poet's father also lived with his son.

Mrs. Milton had four children, three of whom, all daughters, lived to grow up. The mother died in



## JOHN MILTON

childbirth in 1652, being then twenty-six years of age.

The *Aeropagitica*, a *Speech for Unlicensed Printing*, followed the divorce pamphlet, but it also fell upon deaf ears. Of all religious sects the Presbyterians, who were then dominant, are perhaps the least likely to forgo the privileges of interference in the affairs of others! Instead of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, instead of 'a lordly Imprimatur, one from Lambeth House, another from the west end of Paul's', there was appointed a commission of twenty Presbyterians to act as State Licensers. Then was Milton's soul stirred within him to a noble rage. His was a threefold protest—as a citizen of a State he fondly hoped had been free, as an author, and as a reader. As a citizen he protested against so unnecessary and improper an interference. It is not, he cried, 'the unfrocking of a priest, the unmitring of a bishop, that will make us a happy nation,' but the practice of virtue, and virtue means freedom to choose. Milton was a manly politician, and detested with his whole soul grandmotherly legislation. 'He who is not trusted with his own actions, his drift not being known to be evil, and standing to the hazard of law and penalty, has no great argument to think himself reputed in the commonwealth wherein he was born, for other than a fool or a foreigner.' 'They are not skilful considerers of human things who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin.' 'And were I the chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evil doing.' These are texts upon which sermons, not inapplicable to our

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

own day, might be preached. Milton has made our first parent so peculiarly his own, that any observations of his about Adam are interesting.

Many there be that complain of Divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! When God gave him reason He gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience a love or gift which is of force. God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence.

So that according to Milton even Eden was a state of trial. As an author, Milton's protest has great force.

And what if the author shall be one so copious of fancy as to have many things well worth the adding come into his mind after licensing, while the book is yet under the press, which not seldom happens to the best and diligentest writers, and that perhaps a dozen times in one book? The printer does not go beyond his licensed copy. So often then must the author trudge to his leave-giver that those his new insertions may be viewed, and many a jaunt will be made ere that licenser—for it must be the same man—can either be found, or found at leisure; meanwhile either the press must stand still, which is no small damage, or the author lose his accuratest thoughts, and send forth the book worse than he made it, which to a diligent writer is the greatest melancholy and vexation that can befall.

Milton would have had no licensers. Every book should bear the printer's name, and 'mischievous and libellous books' were to be burnt by the common

## JOHN MILTON

hangman, not as an effectual remedy, but as the 'most effectual remedy man's prevention can use'.

The noblest pamphlet in 'our English, the language of men ever famous and foremost in the achievements of liberty',<sup>37</sup> accomplished nothing, and its author must already have thought himself fallen on evil days.

In the year 1645, the year of Naseby, as Mr. Pattison<sup>38</sup> reminds us, appeared the first edition of Milton's Poems. Then, for the first time, were printed *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *The Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and various of the sonnets. The little volume also contained *Comus* and *Lycidas*, which had been previously printed. With the exception of three sonnets and a few scraps of translation, Milton had written nothing but pamphlets since his return from Italy. At the beginning of the volume, which is a small octavo, was a portrait of the poet, most villainously executed. He was really thirty-seven, but flattered himself, as men of that age will, that he looked ten years younger; he was therefore much chagrined to find himself represented as a grim-looking gentleman of at least fifty. The way he revenged himself<sup>39</sup> upon the hapless artist is well known. The volume, with the portrait, is now very scarce, almost rare.

In 1647 Milton removed from the Barbican, both his father and his father-in-law being dead, to a smaller house in Holborn, backing upon Lincoln's Inn Fields, close to where the Inns of Court Hotel now stands, and not far from the spot<sup>40</sup> which was destined to witness the terrible tragedy which was at once to darken and glorify the life of one of Milton's most fervent lovers, Charles Lamb. About this time he is supposed to have

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

abandoned pedagogy. The habit of pamphleteering stuck to him; indeed, it is one seldom thrown off. It is so much easier to throw off the pamphlets.

In 1649 Milton became a public servant, receiving the appointment of Latin Secretary to the Council of Foreign Affairs. He knew some member of the Committee, who obtained his nomination. His duties were purely clerky. It was his business to translate English dispatches into Latin, and foreign dispatches into English. He had nothing whatever to do with the shaping of the foreign policy of the Commonwealth. He was not even employed in translating the most important of the State papers. There is no reason for supposing that he even knew the leading politicians of his time. There is a print one sees about, representing Oliver Cromwell dictating a foreign despatch to John Milton; but it is all imagination, nor is there anything to prove that Cromwell and Milton, the body and soul of English Republicanism, were ever in the same room together, or exchanged words with one another. Milton's name does not occur in the great history of Lord Clarendon.<sup>41</sup> Whitelocke,<sup>42</sup> who was the leading member of the Committee which Milton served, only mentions him once. Thurloe<sup>43</sup> spoke of him as a blind man who wrote Latin letters. Richard Baxter,<sup>43</sup> in his folio history of his *Life and Times*, never mentions Milton at all. He was just a clerk in the service of the Commonwealth, of a scholarly bent, peculiar habit of thought, and somewhat of an odd temper. He was not the man to cultivate great acquaintances, or to fritter away his time waiting the convenience of other people. When once asked to use his influence to obtain for a

## JOHN MILTON

friend an appointment; he replied he had no influence, '*propter paucissimas familiaritates meas cum gratiosis, qui domi fere, idque libenter me confineo.*'<sup>44</sup> The busy great men of the day would have been more than astonished, they would have been disgusted, had they been told that posterity would refer to most of them compendiously, as having lived in the age of Milton. But this need not trouble us.

On the Continent Milton enjoyed a wider reputation on account of his controversy with the great European Scholar, Salmasius,<sup>45</sup> on the sufficiently important and interesting, and then novel, subject of the execution of Charles I. Was it justifiable? Salmasius, a scholar and a Protestant, though of an easy-going description, was employed, or rather, as he had no wages (Milton's hundred Jacobuses<sup>46</sup> being fictitious), nominated by Charles, afterwards the Second, to indict the regicides at the bar of European opinion, which accordingly he did in the Latin language. The work reached this country in the autumn of 1649, and it evidently became the duty of somebody to answer it. Two qualifications were necessary—the replier must be able to read Latin, and to write it after a manner which should escape the ridicule of the scholars of Leyden, Geneva, and Paris. Milton occurred to somebody's mind, and the task was entrusted to him. It is not to be supposed that Cromwell was ever at the pains to read Salmasius for himself, but still it would not have done to have it said that the *Defensio Regia* of so celebrated a scholar as Salmasius remained unanswered, and so the appointment was confirmed, and Milton, no new hand at a pamphlet, set to work. In March 1651 his first *Defence of the English*

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

*People* was in print. In this great pamphlet Milton asserts, as against the doctrine of the divine right of kings, the undisputed sovereignty of the people; and he maintains the proposition that, as well by the law of God, as by the law of nations, and the law of England, a king of England may be brought to trial and death, the people being discharged from all obligations of loyalty when a lawful prince becomes a tyrant, or gives himself over to sloth and voluptuousness. This noble argument, alike worthy of the man and the occasion, is doubtless over-clouded and disfigured by personal abuse of Salmasius, whose relations with his wife had surely as little to do with the head of Charles I as had poor Mr. Dick's memorial.<sup>47</sup> Salmasius, it appears, was henpecked, and to allow yourself to be henpecked was, in Milton's opinion, a high crime and misdemeanour against humanity, and one which rendered a man infamous, and disqualified him from taking part in debate.

It has always been reported that Salmasius, who was getting on in years, and had many things to trouble him besides his own wife, perished in the effort of writing a reply to Milton, in which he made use of language quite as bad as any of his opponent's; but it now appears that this is not so. Indeed, it is generally rash to attribute a man's death to a pamphlet, or an article, either of his own or anybody else's.

Salmasius, however, died, though from natural causes, and his reply was not published till after the Restoration, when the question had become, what it has ever since remained, academical. *the critical; pertaining to*

Other pens were quicker, and to their productions *Academy.*  
Milton, in 1654, replied with his *Second Defence of the*

## JOHN MILTON

*English People*, a tract containing autobiographical details of immense interest and charm. By this time he was totally blind, though, with a touch of that personal sensitiveness ever characteristic of him, he is careful to tell Europe, in the *Second Defence*, that externally his eyes were uninjured, and shone with an unclouded light.

Milton's Defences of the English People are rendered provoking by his extraordinary language concerning his opponents. 'Numskull', 'beast', 'fool', 'puppy', 'knave', 'ass', 'mongrel-cur', are but a few of the epithets employed. This is doubtless mere matter of pleading, a rule of the forum where controversies between scholars are conducted; but for that very reason it makes the pamphlets as provoking to an ordinary reader as an old bill of complaint in Chancery<sup>48</sup> must have been to an impatient suitor who wanted his money. The main issues, when cleared of personalities, are important enough, and are stated by Milton with great clearness. 'Our king made not us, but we him. Nature has given fathers to us all, but we ourselves appointed our own king; so that the people is not for the king, but the king for them.' It was made a matter of great offence amongst monarchs and monarchical persons that Charles was subject to the indignity of a trial. With murders and poisonings kings were long familiar. These were part of the perils of the voyage, for which they were prepared, but, as Salmasius put it, 'for a king to be arraigned in a court of judicature, to be put to plead for his life, to have sentence of death pronounced against him, and that sentence executed,'—oh! horrible impiety. To this



## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Milton replies : ' Tell me, thou superlative fool, whether it be not more just, more agreeable to the rules of humanity and the laws of all human societies, to bring a criminal, be his offence what it will, before a court of justice, to give him leave to speak for himself, and if the law condemns him, then to put him to death as he has deserved, so as he may have time to repent or to recollect himself ; than presently as soon as ever he is taken, to butcher him without more ado ? '

But a king of any spirit would probably answer that he preferred to have his despotism tempered by assassination than by the mercy of a court of John Miltons. To which answer Milton would have rejoined, ' Despotism, I know you not, since we are as free as any people under heaven.'

The weakest part in Milton's case is his having to admit that the Parliament was overawed by the army, which he says was wiser than the senators.

Milton's address to his countrymen, with which he concludes the first *Defence*, is veritably in his grand style :—

He has gloriously delivered you, the first of nations, from the two greatest mischiefs of this life—tyranny and superstition. He has endued you with greatness of mind to be First of Mankind, who after having confined their own king and having had him delivered into their hands, have not scrupled to condemn him judicially, and pursuant to that sentence of condemnation to put him to death. After performing so glorious an action as this, you ought to do nothing that is mean and little ; you ought not to think of, much less do, anything but what is great and sublime. Which to attain to, this is your only way : as



## JOHN MILTON,

you have subdued your enemies in the field, so to make it appear that you of all mankind are best able to subdue Ambition, Avarice, the love of Riches, and can best avoid the corruptions that prosperity is apt to introduce. These are the only arguments by which you will be able to evince that you are not such persons as this fellow represents you, traitors, robbers, murderers, parricides, madmen, that you did not put your king to death out of any ambitious design—that it was not an act of fury or madness, but that it was wholly out of love to your liberty, your religion, to justice, virtue, and your country, that you punished a tyrant. But if it should fall out otherwise (which God forbid), if, as you have been valiant in war, you should grow debauched in peace, and that you should not have learnt, by so eminent, so remarkable an example before your eyes, to fear God, and work righteousness; for my part I shall easily grant and confess (for I cannot deny it), whatever ill men may speak or think of you, to be very true. And you will find in time that God's displeasure against you will be greater than it has been against your adversaries—greater than His grace and favour have been to yourselves, which you have had larger experience of than any other nation under heaven.

This controversy naturally excited greater interest abroad, where Latin was familiarly known, than ever it did here at home. Though it cost Milton his sight, or at all events accelerated the hour of his blindness, he appears greatly to have enjoyed conducting a high dispute in the face of Europe. 'I am,' so he says, 'spreading abroad amongst the cities, the kingdoms, and nations the restored culture of civility and freedom of life.' We certainly managed in this affair of the execution of Charles to get rid of that note of

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

insularity which renders our politics uninviting to the stranger.

Milton, despite his blindness, remained in the public service until after the death of Cromwell; in fact, he did not formally resign until after the Restoration. He played no part, having none to play, in the performances that occurred between those events. He poured forth pamphlets, but there is no reason to believe that they were read otherwise than carelessly and by few. His ideas were his own, and never had a chance of becoming fruitful. There seemed to him to be a ready and an easy way to establish a free Commonwealth, but on the whole it turned out that the easiest thing to do was to invite Charles Stuart to reascend the throne of his ancestors, which he did, and Milton went into hiding.

It is terrible to think how risky the situation was. Milton was undoubtedly in danger of his life, and *Paradise Lost* was unwritten. He was for a time under arrest. But after all he was not one of the regicides—he was only a scribe who had defended regicide. Neither was he a man well associated. He was a solitary, and, for the most part, an unpopular thinker, and blind withal. He was left alone for the rest of his days. He lived first in Jewin Street, off Aldersgate Street, and finally in Artillery Walk, Bunhill Fields. He had married, four years after his first wife's death, a lady who died within a twelve-month, though her memory is kept ever fresh, generation after generation, by her husband's sonnet beginning,

Methought I saw my late espoused saint.

## JOHN MILTON.

Dr. Johnson, it is really worth remembering, called this a poor sonnet.<sup>49</sup> In 1664 Milton married a third and last wife, a lady he had never seen, and who survived her husband for no less a period than fifty-three years, not dying till the year 1727. The poet's household, like his country, never realized any of his ideals. His third wife took decent care of him, and there the matter ended. He did not belong to the category of adored fathers. His daughters did not love him—it seems even probable they disliked him. Mr. Pattison has pointed out that Milton never was on terms even with the scholars of his age. Political acquaintances he had none. He was, in Puritan language, 'unconnected with any place of worship,' and had therefore no pastoral visits to receive, or sermons to discuss. The few friends he had were mostly young men who were attracted to him, and were glad to give him their company; and it is well that he had this pleasure, for he was ever in his wishes a social man—not intended to live alone, and blindness must have made society little short of a necessity for him.

Now it was, in the evening of his days, with a Stuart once more upon the throne, and Episcopacy finally installed, that Milton, a defeated thinker, a baffled pamphleteer—for had not Salmasius triumphed?—with Horton and Italy far, far behind him, set himself to keep the promise of his glorious youth, and compose a poem the world should not willingly let die.<sup>50</sup> His manner of life was this. In summer he rose at four, in winter at five. He went to bed at nine. He began the day with having the Hebrew Scriptures read to him. Then he contemplated. At seven his man came to

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

him again, and he read and wrote till an early dinner. For exercise he either walked in the garden or swung in a machine. Besides conversation, his only other recreation was music. He played the organ and the bass viol. He would sometimes sing himself. After recreation of this kind he would return to his study to be read to till six. After six his friends were admitted, and would sit with him till eight. At eight he had his supper—olives or something light. He was very abstemious. After supper he smoked a pipe of tobacco, drank a glass of water, and went to bed. He found the night a favourable time for composition, and what he composed at night he dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow chair with his leg thrown over the arm.

In 1664 *Paradise Lost* was finished, but as in 1665 came the Great Plague, and after the Great Plague the Great Fire, it was long before the MS. found its way into the hands of the licenser. It is interesting to note that the first member of the general public who read *Paradise Lost*, I hope all through, was a clergyman of the name of Tomkyns, the deputy of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Sheldon. The Archbishop was the State Licenser for religious books, but of course did not do the work himself. Tomkyns did the work, and was for a good while puzzled what to make of the old Republican's poem. At last, and after some singularly futile criticisms, Tomkyns consented to allow the publication of *Paradise Lost*, which accordingly appeared in 1667, admirably printed, and at the price of 3s. a copy. The author's agreement with the publisher is in writing—as Mr. Besant<sup>51</sup> tells us all

## JOHN MILTON.

agreements with publishers should be—and may be seen in the British Museum. Its terms are clear. The poet was to have £5 down; another £5 when the first edition, which was not to exceed 1,500 copies, was sold; a third £5 when a second edition was sold; and a fourth and last £5 when a third edition was sold. He got his first £5, also his second, and after his death his widow sold all her rights for £8. Consequently £18, which represents perhaps £50 of our present currency, was Milton's share of all the money that has been made by the sale of his great poem. But the praise is still his. The sale was very considerable. The 'general reader' no doubt preferred the poems of Cleaveland and Flatman,<sup>52</sup> but Milton found an audience which was fit and 'not fewer'<sup>53</sup> than ever is the case when noble poetry is first produced.

*Paradise Regained* was begun upon the completion of *Paradise Lost*, and appeared with *Samson Agonistes* in 1671, and here ended Milton's life as a producing poet. He lived on till Sunday, 8th November 1674, when the gout, or what was then called gout, struck in and he died, and was buried beside his father in the Church of St. Giles, Cripplegate. He remained laborious to the last, and imposed upon himself all kinds of drudgery, compiling dictionaries, histories of Britain and Russia. He must have worked not so much from love of his subjects as from dread of idleness. But he had hours of relaxation, of social intercourse, and of music; and it is pleasant to remember that one pipe of tobacco. It consecrates your own.

Against Milton's great poem it is sometimes alleged that it is not read; and yet it must, I think, be admitted

## AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

that for one person who has read Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, ten thousand might easily be found who have read *Paradise Lost*. Its popularity has been widespread. Mr. Mark Pattison and Mr. John Bright<sup>54</sup> measure some ground between them. No other poem can be mentioned which has so coloured English thought as Milton's, and yet, according to the French senator<sup>55</sup> whom Mr. Arnold has introduced to the plain reader '*Paradise Lost* is a false poem, a grotesque poem, a tiresome poem.' It is not easy for those who have a touch of Milton's temper, though none of his genius, to listen to this foreign criticism quite coolly.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL



JONATHAN SWIFT



17994

## II. JONATHAN SWIFT

(1667-1745)

OF English parents, and of a good English family of clergymen, Swift was born in Dublin in 1667, seven months after the death of his father, who had come to practise there as a lawyer. The boy went to school at Kilkenny, and afterwards to Trinity College, Dublin, where he got a degree with difficulty, and was wild, and witty, and poor. In 1688, by the recommendation of his mother, Swift was received into the family of Sir William Temple, who had known Mr. Swift in Ireland. He left his patron in 1694, and the next year took orders in Dublin. But he threw up the small Irish preferment which he got and returned to Temple, in whose family he remained until Sir William's death in 1699. His hopes of advancement in England failing, Swift returned to Ireland, and took the living of Laracor. Hither he invited Hester Johnson, Temple's natural daughter, with whom he had contracted a tender friendship while they were both dependants of Temple's. And with an occasional visit to England, Swift now passed nine years at home.

In 1709 he came to England, and, with a brief visit to Ireland, during which he took possession of his deanery of Saint Patrick, he now passed five years in England, taking the most distinguished part in the political transactions which terminated with the death of Queen Anne. After her death, his party disgraced,

## JONATHAN SWIFT

and his hopes of ambition over, Swift returned to Dublin, where he remained twelve years. In this time he wrote the famous *Drapier's Letters* and *Gulliver's Travels*. He married Hester Johnson (Stella), and buried Esther Vanhomrigh (Vanessa), who had followed him to Ireland from London, where she had contracted a violent passion for him. In 1726 and 1727 Swift was in England, which he quitted for the last time on hearing of his wife's illness. Stella died in January 1728, and Swift not until 1745, having passed the last five of the seventy-eight years of his life with an impaired intellect and keepers to watch him.

You know, of course, that Swift has had many biographers ; his life has been told by the kindest and most good-natured of men, Scott,<sup>2</sup> who admires but can't bring himself to love him ; and by stout old Johnson,<sup>3</sup> who, forced to admit him into the company of poets, receives the famous Irishman, and takes off his hat to him with a bow of surly recognition, scans him from head to foot, and passes over to the other side of the street. Doctor Wilde<sup>4</sup> of Dublin, who has written a most interesting volume on the closing years of Swift's life, calls Johnson ' the most malignant of his biographers ' ; it is not easy for an English critic to please Irishmen—perhaps to try and please them. And yet Johnson truly admires Swift : Johnson does not quarrel with Swift's change of politics, or doubt his sincerity of religion : about the famous Stella and Vanessa controversy the Doctor does not bear very hardly on Swift. But he could not give the Dean that honest hand of his ; the stout old man puts it into his breast, and moves off from him.

Would we have liked to live with him? That is a question which, in dealing with these people's works and thinking of their lives and peculiarities, every reader of biographies must put to himself. Would you have liked to be a friend of the great Dean? I should like to have been Shakespeare's shoeblack—just to have lived in his house, just to have worshipped him—to have run on his errands, and seen that sweet serene face. I should like, as a young man, to have lived on Fielding's staircase in the Temple, and after helping him up to bed perhaps, and opening his door with his latch-key, to have shaken hands with him in the morning, and heard him talk and crack jokes over his breakfast and his mug of small beer. Who would not give something to pass a night at the club with Johnson, and Goldsmith, and James Boswell, Esquire, of Auchinleck? The charm of Addison's companionship and conversation has passed to us by fond tradition—but Swift? If you had been his inferior in parts (and that, with a great respect for all persons present, I fear is only very likely), his equal in mere social station, he would have bullied, scorned, and insulted you; if, undeterred by his great reputation, you had met him like a man, he would have quailed before you, and not had the pluck to reply, and gone home, and years after written a foul epigram about you—watched for you in a sewer, and come out to assail you with a coward's blow and a dirty bludgeon. If you had been a lord with a blue riband,<sup>6</sup> who flattered his vanity, or could help his ambition, he would have been the most delightful company in the world. He would have been so manly, so sarcastic, so bright, odd,

## JONATHAN SWIFT

and original, that you might think he had no object in view but the indulgence of his humour, and that he was the most reckless, simple creature in the world. How he would have torn your enemies to pieces for you! and made fun of the Opposition! His servility was so boisterous that it looked like independence; he would have done your errands, but with the air of patronizing you; and after fighting your battles, masked, in the street or the press, would have kept on his hat before your wife and daughters in the drawing-room, content to take that sort of pay for his tremendous services as a bravo.

Thus at the bar, the booby Bettsworth,  
Though half-a-crown o'er pays his sweat's worth  
Who knows in law nor text nor margin,  
Calls Singleton his brother serjeant!<sup>7</sup>

He says as much himself in one of his letters to Bolingbroke<sup>8</sup> :—

All my endeavours to distinguish myself were only for want of a great title and fortune, that I might be used like a lord by those who have an opinion of my parts; whether right or wrong is no great matter. And so the reputation of wit and great learning does the office of a blue riband or a coach and six.

Could there be a greater candour? It is an outlaw, who says, 'These are my brains; with these I'll win titles and compete with fortune. These are my bullets; these I'll turn into gold'; and he hears the sound of coaches and six, takes the road like Macheath,<sup>9</sup> and makes society stand and deliver. They are all on their knees before him. Down go my Lord Bishop's

apron, and his Grace's blue riband, and my Lady's brocade petticoat in the mud. He eases the one of a living, the other of a patent place, the third of a little snug post about the Court, and gives them over to followers of his own. The great prize has not come yet. The coach with the mitre and crozier<sup>10</sup> in it, which he intends to have for his share, has been delayed on the way from Saint James's; and he waits and waits until nightfall, when his runners come and tell him that the coach has taken a different road, and escaped him. So he fires his pistols into the air with a curse, and rides away into his own country.

Swift's seems to me to be as good a name to point a moral or adorn a tale<sup>11</sup> of ambition as any hero's that ever lived and failed. But we must remember that the morality was lax—that other gentlemen besides himself took the road in his day—that public society was in a strange disordered condition, and the State was ravaged by other condottieri.<sup>12</sup> The Boyne was being fought and won, and lost—the bells rung in William's victory, in the very same tone with which they would have pealed for James's. Men were loose upon politics, and had to shift for themselves. They, as well as old beliefs and institutions, had lost their moorings and gone adrift in the storm. As in the South Sea Bubble,<sup>13</sup> almost everybody gambled; as in the Railway mania—not many centuries ago—almost everyone took his unlucky share: a man of that time, of the vast talents and ambition of Swift, could scarce do otherwise than grasp at his prize, and make his spring at his opportunity. His bitterness, his scorn, his rage, his subsequent misanthropy are ascribed by some panegyrists to



## JONATHAN SWIFT

a deliberate conviction of mankind's unworthiness, and a desire to amend them by castigation. His youth was bitter, as that of a great genius bound down by ignoble ties, and powerless in a near dependence; his age was bitter, like that of a great genius, that had fought the battle and nearly won it, and lost it, and thought of it afterwards, writhing in a lonely exile. A man may attribute to the gods, if he likes, what is caused by his own fury, or disappointment, or self-will. What public man—what statesman projecting a coup—what king determined on an invasion of his neighbour—what satirist meditating an onslaught on society or an individual, can't give a pretext for his move? There was a French general the other day who proposed to march into this country and put it to sack and pillage, in revenge for humanity outraged by our conduct at Copenhagen: there is always some excuse for men of the aggressive turn. They are of their nature warlike, predatory, eager for fight, plunder, dominion.

As fierce a beak and talon as ever struck—as strong a wing as ever beat, belonged to Swift. I am glad, for one, that fate wrested the prey out of his claws, and cut his wings and chained him. One can gaze, and not without awe and pity, at the lonely eagle chained behind the bars.

That Swift was born at No. 7 Hoey's Court, Dublin, on the 30th November 1667, is a certain fact, of which nobody will deny the sister island the honour and glory; but, it seems to me, he was no more an Irishman than a man born of English parents at Calcutta is a Hindoo. Goldsmith was an Irishman, and always

an Irishman : Steele<sup>15</sup> was an Irishman, and always an Irishman : Swift's heart was English and in England, his habits English, his logic eminently English ; his statement is elaborately simple ; he shuns tropes and metaphors, and uses his ideas and words with a wise thrift and economy, as he used his money : with which he could be generous and splendid upon great occasions, but which he husbanded when there was no need to spend it. He never indulges in needless extravagance of rhetoric, lavish epithets, profuse imagery. He lays his opinion before you with a grave simplicity and a perfect neatness. Dreading ridicule too, as a man of his humour—above all, an Englishman of his humour—certainly would, he is afraid to use the poetical power which he really possessed ; one often fancies in reading him that he dares not be eloquent when he might ; that he does not speak above his voice, as it were, and the tone of society.

His initiation into politics, his knowledge of business, his knowledge of polite life, his acquaintance with literature even, which he could not have pursued very sedulously during that reckless career at Dublin, Swift got under the roof of Sir William Temple. He was fond of telling in after life what quantities of books he devoured there, and how King William taught him to cut asparagus in the Dutch fashion. It was at Shene and at Moor Park, with a salary of twenty pounds and a dinner at the upper servants' table, that this great and lonely Swift passed a ten years' apprenticeship—wore a cassock that was only not a livery—bent down a knee as proud as Lucifer's to supplicate my Lady's good graces, or run on his honour's errands. It was



## JONATHAN SWIFT

here, as he was writing at Temple's table, or following his patron's walk, that he saw and heard the men who had governed the 'great' world—measured himself with them, looking up from his silent corner, gauged their brains, weighed their wits, turned them, and tried them, and marked them. Ah! what platitudes he must have heard! what feeble jokes! what pompous commonplaces! what small men they must have seemed under those enormous periwigs, to the swarthy, uncouth, silent Irish secretary. I wonder whether it ever struck Temple, that that Irishman was his master! I suppose that dismal conviction did not present itself under the ambrosial wig, or Temple could never have lived with Swift. Swift sickened, rebelled, left the service—ate humble pie and came back again; and so for ten years went on, gathering learning, swallowing scorn, and submitting with a stealthy rage to his fortune.

Temple's style is the perfection of practised and easy good breeding. If he does not penetrate very deeply into a subject, he professes a very gentlemanly acquaintance with it; if he makes rather a parade of Latin, it was the custom of his day, as it was the custom for a gentleman to envelop his head in a periwig and his hands in lace ruffles. If he wears buckles and square-toed shoes, he steps in them with a consummate grace, and you never hear their creak, or find them treading upon any lady's train or any rival's heels in the Court crowd. When that grows too hot or too agitated for him, he politely leaves it. He retires to his retreat of Shene or Moor Park; and lets the King's party and the Prince of Orange's party battle it out among

W. M. THACKERAY

themselves. He reveres the Sovereign (and no man perhaps ever testified to his loyalty by so elegant a bow) ; he admires the Prince of Orange ; but there is one person whose ease and comfort he loves more than all the princes in Christendom, and that valuable member of society is himself, Gulielmus Temple, Baronettus.<sup>16</sup> One sees him in his retreat : between his study chair and his tulip beds, clipping his apricots and pruning his essays—the statesman, the ambassador no more ; but the philosopher, the Epicurean, the fine gentleman and courtier at St. James's as at Shene ; where, in place of kings and fair ladies, he pays his court to the Ciceronian majesty ;<sup>17</sup> or walks a minuet with the Epic Muse ; or dallies by the south wall with the ruddy nymph of gardens.

Temple seems to have received and exacted a prodigious deal of veneration from his household, and to have been coaxed, and warmed, and cuddled by the people around about him, as delicately as any of the plants which he loved. When he fell ill in 1693, the household was aghast at his indisposition ; mild Dorothea his wife, the best companion of the best of men—

Mild Dorothea, peaceful, wise and great,  
Trembling beheld the doubtful hand of fate.<sup>18</sup>

As for Dorinda, his sister,—

Those who would grief describe, might come and trace  
Its watery footsteps in Dorinda's face.  
To see her weep, joy every face forsook,  
And grief flung sables on each menial look.  
The humble tribe mourned for the quickening soul,  
That furnished spirit and motion through the whole.

## JONATHAN SWIFT

Isn't that line in which grief is described as putting the menials into a mourning livery, a fine image? One of the menials wrote it, who did not like that Temple livery nor those twenty pound wages. Cannot one fancy the uncouth young servitor, with downcast eyes, books and papers in hand, following at his honour's heels in the garden walk; or taking his honour's orders as he stands by the great chair, where Sir William has the gout, and his feet all blistered with moxa?<sup>19</sup> When Sir William has the gout or scolds it must be hard work at the second table; the Irish secretary owned as much afterwards; and when he came to dinner, how he must have lashed and growled and torn the household with his gibes and scorn! What would the steward say about the pride of them Irish schollards—and this one had got no great credit even at his Irish college, if the truth were known—and what a contempt his Excellency's own gentleman must have had for Parson Teague<sup>20</sup> from Dublin! (The valets and chaplains were always at war. It is hard to say which Swift thought the more contemptible.) And what must have been the sadness, the sadness and terror, of the housekeeper's little daughter with the curling black ringlets and the sweet smiling face, when the secretary who teaches her to read and write, and whom she loves and reverences above all things—above mother, above mild Dorothea, above that tremendous Sir William in his square toes and periwig—when Mr. Swift comes down from his master with rage in his heart, and has not a kind word even for little Hester Johnson?

Perhaps, for the Irish secretary, his Excellency's

W. M. THACKERAY

condescension was even more cruel than his frowns. Sir William would perpetually quote Latin and the ancient classics à propos of his gardens and his Dutch statues, and plates-bandes,<sup>21</sup> and talk about Epicurus and Diogenes Lærtius, Julius Caesar, Semiramis, and the gardens of the Hesperides, Mæcenæ, Strabo describing Jericho, and the Assyrian kings.<sup>22</sup> A propos of beans, he would mention Pythagoras's precept to abstain from beans, and that this precept probably meant that wise men should abstain from public affairs. He is a placid Epicurean, he is a Pythagorean philosopher; he is a wise man—that is the deduction. Does not Swift think so? One can imagine the downcast eyes lifted up for a moment, and the flash of scorn which they emit. Swift's eyes were as azure as the heavens; Pope<sup>23</sup> says nobly (as everything Pope said and thought of his friend was good and noble), 'His eyes are as azure as the heavens, and have a charming archness in them.' And one person in that household, that pompous, stately, kindly Moor Park, saw heaven nowhere else.

But the Temple amenities and solemnities did not agree with Swift. He was half-killed with a surfeit of Shene pippins; and in a garden seat which he devised for himself at Moor Park, and where he devoured greedily the stock of books within his reach, he caught a vertigo and deafness which punished and tormented him through life. He could not bear the place or the servitude. Even in that poem of courtly condolence, from which we have quoted a few lines of mock melancholy, he breaks out<sup>24</sup> of the funeral procession with a mad shriek, as it were, and rushes away crying his

## JONATHAN SWIFT

own grief, cursing his own fate, foreboding madness, and forsaken by fortune, and even hope.

I don't know anything more melancholy than the letter to Temple, in which, after having broken from his bondage, the poor wretch crouches piteously toward his cage again, and deprecates his master's anger. He asks for testimonials for orders.

The particulars required of me are what relate to morals and learning; and the reasons of quitting your honour's family—that is, whether the last was occasioned by any ill action. They are left entirely to your honour's mercy, though in the first I think I cannot reproach myself for anything further than for infirmities. This is all I dare at present beg from your honour, under circumstances of life not worth your regard: what is left me to wish (next to the health and prosperity of your honour and family) is that Heaven would one day allow me the opportunity of leaving my acknowledgements at your feet. I beg my most humble duty and service be presented to my ladies, your honour's lady and sister.

Can prostration fall deeper? Could a slave bow lower?

Twenty years afterwards Bishop Kennet,<sup>25</sup> describing the same man, says:—

Dr. Swift came into the coffee-house and had a bow from everybody but me. When I came to the antechamber (at Court) to wait before prayers, Dr. Swift was the principal man of talk and business. He was soliciting the Earl of Arran to speak to his brother, the Duke of Ormond, to get a place for a clergyman. He was promising Mr. Thorold to undertake, with my Lord Treasurer, that he should obtain a salary of £200 per annum as member of the English Church at Rotterdam. He stopped F. Gwynne,

Esquire, going into the Queen with the red bag, and told him aloud, he had something to say to him from my Lord Treasurer. He took out his gold watch, and telling the time of the day, complained that it was very late. A gentleman said he was too fast. 'How can I help it,' says the Doctor, 'if the courtiers give me a watch that won't go right?' Then he instructed a young nobleman, that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope (a papist), who had begun a translation of Homer into English, for which he would have them all subscribe: 'For,' says he, 'he shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him.' Lord Treasurer, after leaving the Queen, came through the room, beckoning Doctor Swift to follow him—both went off just before prayers.

There's a little malice in the Bishop's 'just before prayers'.

This picture of the great Dean seems a true one, and is harsh, though not altogether unpleasant. He was doing good, and to deserving men, too, in the midst of these intrigues and triumphs. His journals and a thousand anecdotes of his relate his kind acts and rough manners. His hand was constantly stretched out to relieve an honest man—he was cautious about his money, but ready. If you were in a strait, would you like such a benefactor? I think I would rather have had a potato and a friendly word from Goldsmith than have been beholden to the Dean for a guinea and a dinner. He insulted a man as he served him, made women cry, guests look foolish, bullied unlucky friends, and flung his benefactions into poor men's faces. No; the Dean was no Irishman—no Irishman ever gave but with a kind word and a kind heart.



## JONATHAN SWIFT

It is told, as if it were to Swift's credit, that the Dean of Saint Patrick's performed his family devotions every morning regularly, but with such secrecy that the guests in his house were never in the least aware of the ceremony. There was no need surely why a Church dignitary should assemble his family privily in a crypt and as if he was afraid of heathen persecution. But I think the world was right, and the bishops who advised Queen Anne when they counselled her not to appoint the author of the *Tale of a Tub*<sup>26</sup> to a bishopric, gave perfectly good advice. The man who wrote the arguments and illustrations in that wild book could not but be aware what must be the sequel of the propositions which he laid down. The boon companion of Pope and Bolingbroke, who chose these as the friends of his life, and the recipients of his confidence and affection, must have heard many an argument, and joined in many a conversation over Pope's port, or St. John's burgundy, which would not bear to be repeated at other men's boards.

I know of few things more conclusive as to the sincerity of Swift's religion than his advice to poor John Gay<sup>27</sup> to turn clergyman, and look out for a seat on the Bench, Gay, the author of the *Beggar's Opera*—Gay, the wildest of the wits about town—it was this man that Jonathan Swift advised to take orders—to invest in a cassock and bands—just as he advised him to husband his shillings and put his thousand pounds out at interest. The Queen, and the bishops, and the world, were right in mistrusting the religion of that man.

In his old age, looking at the *Tale of a Tub*, when he said, 'Good God, what a genius I had when I wrote

that book ! ' I think he was admiring, not the genius, but the consequences to which the genius had brought him—a vast genius, a magnificent genius, a genius wonderfully bright, and dazzling, and strong—to seize, to know, to see, to flash upon falsehood and scorch it into perdition, to penetrate into the hidden motives, and expose the black thoughts of men—an awful, an evil spirit.

Ah, man ! you, educated in Epicurean Temple's library, you whose friends were Pope and St. John—what made you to swear to fatal vows, and bind yourself to a life-long hypocrisy before the Heaven which you adored with such real wonder, humility, and reverence ? For Swift's was a reverent, was a pious spirit—for Swift could love and could pray. Through the storms and tempests of his furious mind, the stars of religion and love break out in the blue, shining serenely, though hidden by the driving clouds and the maddened hurricane of his life.

The *saeva indignatio* of which he spoke as lacerating his heart, and which he dares to inscribe on his tombstone—as if the wretch who lay under that stone waiting God's judgement had a right to be angry—breaks out from him in a thousand pages of his writing, and tears and rends him. Against men in office, he having been overthrown ; against men in England, he having lost his chance of preferment there, the furious exile never fails to rage and curse. Is it fair to call the famous *Drapier's Letters* patriotism ? They are masterpieces of dreadful humour and invective ; they are reasoned logically enough too, but the proposition is as monstrous and fabulous as the



## JONATHAN SWIFT

Lilliputian island. It is not that the grievance is so great, but there is his enemy—the assault is wonderful for its activity and terrible rage. It is Samson with a bone in his hand,<sup>28</sup> rushing on his enemies and felling them: one admires not the cause so much as the strength, the anger, the fury of the champion. As is the case with madmen, certain subjects provoke him, and awaken his fits of wrath. Marriage is one of these; in a hundred passages in his writings he rages against it; rages against children; an object of constant satire, even more contemptible in his eyes than a lord's chaplain, is a poor curate with a large family. The idea of this luckless paternity never fails to bring down from him gibes and foul language. Could Dick Steele, or Goldsmith, or Fielding, in his most reckless moment of satire, have written anything like the Dean's famous *Modest Proposal*<sup>29</sup> for eating children? Not one of these but melts at the thoughts of childhood, fondles and caresses it. Mr. Dean has no such softness, and enters the nursery with the tread and gaiety of an ogre. 'I have been assured,' says he in the *Modest Proposal*, 'by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child, well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt it will equally serve in a *ragout*.'<sup>30</sup> And taking up this pretty joke, as his way is, he argues it with perfect gravity and logic. He turns and twists this subject in a score of different ways; he hashes it; and he serves it up cold; and he garnishes it; and relishes it always. He describes the little animal as 'dropped from its dam', advising

that the mother should let it suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render it plump and fat for a good table! 'A child,' says his Reverence, 'will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish', and so on; and the subject being so delightful that he can't leave it, he proceeds to recommend, in place of venison for squires' tables, 'the bodies of young lads and maidens not exceeding fourteen or under twelve.' Amiable humorist! laughing castigat<sup>or</sup> of morals! There was a process well known and practised in the Dean's gay days; when a lout entered the coffee-house, the wags proceeded to what they called 'roasting'<sup>31</sup> him. This is roasting a subject with a vengeance. The Dean had a native genius for it.

And it was not merely by the sarcastic method that Swift exposed the unreasonableness of loving and having children. In *Gulliver*, the folly of love and marriage is urged by graver arguments and advice. In the famous Lilliputian kingdom, Swift speaks with approval of the practice of instantly removing children from their parents and educating them by the State; and amongst his favourite horses, a pair of foals are stated to be the very utmost a well-regulated equine couple would permit themselves. In fact, our great satirist was of opinion that conjugal love was unadvisable, and illustrated the theory by his own practice and example—God help him!—which made him about the most wretched being in God's world.

The grave and logical conduct of an absurd proposition, as exemplified in the cannibal proposal just

mentioned, is our author's constant method through all his works of humour. Given a country of people six inches or sixty feet high, and by the mere process of the logic, a thousand wonderful absurdities are evolved, at so many stages of the calculation. Turning to the First Minister who waited behind him with a white staff near as tall as the mainmast of the *Royal Sovereign* the King of Brobdingnag observes how contemptible a thing human grandeur is, as represented by such a contemptible little creature as Gulliver. 'The Emperor of Lilliput's features are strong and masculine' (what a surprising humour there is in this description!)—'The Emperor's features,' Gulliver says, 'are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip, an arched nose, his complexion olive, his countenance erect, his body and limbs well proportioned, and his deportment majestic. He is taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his Court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into beholders.'

'What a surprising humour there is in these descriptions! How noble the satire is here! how just and honest! How perfect the image! Mr. Macaulay<sup>32</sup> has quoted the charming lines of the poet where the king of the pigmies is measured by the same standard. We have all read in Milton of the spear that was like 'the mast of some great amiral';<sup>33</sup> but these images are surely likely to come to the comic poet originally. The subject is before him. He is turning it in a thousand ways. He is full of it. The figure suggests itself naturally to him, and comes out of his subject, as in that wonderful passage, when Gulliver's box having been dropped by the eagle into the sea, and

Gulliver having been received into the ship's cabin, he calls upon the crew to bring the box into the cabin, and put it on the table, the cabin being only a quarter the size of the box. It is the *veracity* of the blunder which is so admirable. Had a man come from such a country as Brobdingnag, he would have blundered so.

But the best stroke of humour, if there be a best in that abounding book, is that where Gulliver, in the unpronounceable country,<sup>34</sup> describes his parting from his master the horse.

'I took,' he says, 'a second leave of my master, but as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his hoof, he did me the honour to raise it gently to my mouth. I am not ignorant how much I have been censured for mentioning this last particular. Detractors are pleased to think it improbable that so illustrious a person should descend to give so great a mark of distinction, to a creature so inferior as I. Neither have I forgotten how apt some travellers are to boast of extraordinary favours they have received. But if these censurers were better acquainted with the noble and courteous disposition of the Houyhnhnms they would soon change their opinion.'

The surprise here, the audacity of circumstantial evidence, the astounding gravity of the speaker, who is not ignorant how much he has been censured, the nature of the favour conferred, and the respectful exultation at the receipt of it, are surely complete; it is truth topsy-turvy, entirely logical and absurd.

As for the humour and conduct of this famous fable, I suppose there is no person who reads but must admire; as for the moral, I think it horrible, shameful,

## JONATHAN SWIFT

unmanly, blasphemous; and giant and great as this Dean is, I say we should hoot him. Some of this audience mayn't have read the last part of *Gulliver*, and to such I would recall the advice of the venerable Mr. Punch to persons about to marry, and say 'Don't'. When Gulliver first lands among the Yahoos, the naked howling wretches clamber up trees and assault him, and he describes himself as 'almost stifled with the filth which fell about him'. The reader of the fourth part of *Gulliver's Travels* is like the hero himself in this instance. It is Yahoo language: a monster gibbering shrieks, and gnashing imprecations against mankind—tearing down all shreds of modesty, past all sense of manliness and shame; filthy in work, filthy in thought, furious, raging, obscene.

And dreadful it is to think that Swift knew the tendency of his creed—the fatal rocks towards which his logic desperately drifted. That last part of *Gulliver* is only a consequence of what has gone before; and the worthlessness of all mankind, the pettiness, cruelty, pride, imbecility, the general vanity, the foolish pretension, the mock greatness, the pompous dulness, the mean aims, the base successes—all these were present to him; it was with the din of these curses of the world, blasphemies against Heaven, shrieking in his ears, that he began to write his dreadful allegory—of which the meaning is that man is utterly wicked, desperate, and imbecile, and his passions are so monstrous, and his boasted powers so mean, that he is and deserves to be the slave of brutes, and ignorance is better than his vaunted reason. What had this man done? what secret remorse was rankling at his heart? what fever

was boiling in him, that he should see all the world bloodshot? We view the world with our own eyes, each of us; and we make from within us the world we see. A weary heart gets no gladness out of sunshine; a selfish man is sceptical about friendship, as a man with no ear doesn't care for music. A frightful self-consciousness it must have been, which looked on mankind so darkly through those keen eyes of Swift.

A remarkable story<sup>35</sup> is told by Scott, of Delany,<sup>36</sup> who interrupted Archbishop King<sup>37</sup> and Swift in a conversation which left the prelate in tears, and from which Swift rushed away with marks of strong terror and agitation in his countenance upon which the Archbishop said to Delany, 'You have just met the most unhappy man on earth; but on the subject of his wretchedness you must never ask a question.'

The most unhappy man on earth; —*Miserrimus*— what a character of him! And at this time all the great wits of England had been at his feet. All Ireland had shouted after him, and worshipped him as a liberator, a saviour, the greatest Irish patriot and citizen. Dean Drapier Bickerstaff<sup>38</sup> Gulliver—the most famous statesman and the greatest poets of his day had applauded him and done him homage; and at this time, writing over to Bolingbroke from Ireland, he, says, 'It is time for me to have done with the world, and so I would if I could get into a better before I was called into the best, and not die here in a rage, like a poisoned rat in a hole.'

We have spoken about the men, and Swift's behaviour to them; and now it behoves us not to forget that there are certain other persons in the creation who had



## JONATHAN SWIFT

rather intimate relations with the great Dean. Two women whom he loved and injured are known by every reader of books so familiarly that if we had seen them, or if they had been relatives of our own, we scarcely could have known them better. Who hasn't in his mind an image of Stella? Who does not love her? Fair and tender creature: pure and affectionate heart. Boots it to you, now that you have been at rest for a hundred and twenty years, not divided in death from the cold heart which caused yours, whilst it beat, such faithful pangs of love and grief—boots it to you now, that the whole world loves and deploras you? Scarce any man, I believe, ever thought of that grave, that did not cast a flower of pity on it, and write over it a sweet epitaph. Gentle lady, so lovely, so loving, so unhappy! you have had countless champions; millions of manly hearts mourning for you. From generation to generation we take up the fond tradition of your beauty, we watch and follow your tragedy, your bright morning love and purity, your constancy, your grief, your sweet martyrdom. We know your legend by heart. You are one of the saints of English story.

And if Stella's love and innocence are charming to contemplate, I will say that, in spite of ill-usage, in spite of drawbacks, in spite of mysterious separation and union, of hope delayed and sickened heart—in the teeth of Vanessa, and that little episodical aberration which plunged Swift into such woeful pitfalls and quagmires of amorous perplexity—in spite of the verdicts of most women, I believe, who, as far as my experience and conversations go, generally take Vanessa's part in the controversy,—in spite of the tears

which Swift caused Stella to shed, and the rocks and barriers which fate and temper interposed, and which prevented the pure course of that true love from running smoothly—the brightest part of Swift's story, the pure star in that dark and tempestuous life of Swift's, is his love for Hester Johnson. It has been my business, professionally, of course, to go through a deal of sentimental reading in my time, and to acquaint myself with lovmaking, as it has been described in various languages, and at various ages of the world; and I know of nothing more manly, more tender, more exquisitely touching, than some of these brief notes, written in what Swift calls 'his little language' in his journal to Stella. He writes to her night and morning often. He never sends away a letter to her but he begins a new one on the same day. He can't bear to let go her kind little hand, as it were. He knows that she is thinking of him, and longing for him far away in Dublin yonder. He takes her letters from under his pillow and talks to them, familiarly, paternally, with fond epithets and pretty caresses—as he would to the sweet and artless creature who loved him. 'Stay,' he writes one morning—it is the 14th of December 1710—'Stay, I will answer some of your letters this morning in bed. Let me see. Come and appear, little letter! Here I am,' says he, and what say you to Stella this morning fresh and fasting? And can Stella read this writing without hurting her dear eyes?' he goes on, after more kind prattle and fond whispering. The dear eyes shine clearly upon him then—the good angel of his life is with him and blessing him. Ah, it was a hard fate that wrung from them so many tears, and stabbed



## JONATHAN SWIFT

pitilessly that pure and tender bosom. A hard fate : but would she have changed it? I have heard a woman say that she would have taken Swift's cruelty to have had his tenderness. He had a sort of worship for her whilst he wounded her. He speaks of her after she is gone ; of her wit, of her kindness, of her grace, of her beauty, with a simple love and reverence that are indescribably touching ; in contemplation of her goodness his hard heart melts into pathos ; his cold rhyme kindles and glows into poetry, and he falls down on his knees, so to speak, before the angel whose life he had embittered, confesses his own wretchedness and unworthiness, and adores her with cries of remorse and love.<sup>39</sup>

One little triumph Stella had in her life—one dear little piece of injustice was performed in her favour, for which I confess, for my part, I can't help thanking fate and the Dean. That other person was sacrificed to her—that—that young woman, who lived five doors from Doctor Swift's lodgings in Bury Street, and who flattered him, and made love to him in such an outrageous manner—Vanessa was thrown over.

Swift did not keep Stella's letters to him in reply to those he wrote to her. He kept Bolingbroke's, and Pope's, and Harley's, and Peterborough's : but Stella 'very carefully', the *Lives* say, kept Swift's. Of course : that is the way of the world : and so we cannot tell what her style was, or of what sort were the little letters which the Doctor placed there at night, and bade to appear from under his pillow of a morning. But in Letter IV of that famous collection he describes his lodging in Bury Street, where he has the first floor,

a dining-room and bed chamber, at eight shillings a week ; and in Letter VI he says ' he has visited a lady just come to town,' whose name somehow is not mentioned ; and in Letter VIII he enters a query of Stella's : ' What do you mean " that boards near me, that I dine with now and then ? " What the deuce ! You know whom I have dined with every day since I left you, better than I do.' Of course she does. Of course Swift has not the slightest idea of what she means. But in a few letters more it turns out that the Doctor has been to dine ' gravely ' with a Mrs. Vanhomrigh : then that he has been to ' his neighbour ' : then that he has been unwell, and means to dine for the whole week with his neighbour ! Stella was quite right in her previsions. She saw from the very first hint what was going to happen ; and scented Vanessa in the air. The rival is at the Dean's feet. The pupil and teacher are reading together, and drinking tea together, and going to prayers, together, and learning Latin together, and conjugating *amo, amas, amavi*<sup>40</sup> together. The ' little language ' is over for poor Stella. By the rule of grammar and the course of conjugation, doesn't *amavi* come after *amo* and *amas* ?

The loves of Cadenus and Vanessa<sup>41</sup> you may peruse in Cadenus's own poem on the subject, and in poor Vanessa's vehement expostulatory verses and letters to him : she adores him, implores him, admires him, thinks him something godlike, and only prays to be admitted to lie at his feet. As they are bringing him home from church, those divine feet of Doctor Swift's are found pretty often in Vanessa's parlour. He likes to be admired and adored. He finds Miss Vanhomrigh

## JONATHAN SWIFT

to be a woman of great taste and spirit, and beauty and wit, and a fortune too. He sees her every day ; he does not tell Stella about the business ; until the impetuous Vanessa becomes too fond of him, until the Doctor is quite frightened by the young woman's ardour, and confounded by her warmth. He wanted to marry neither of them—that I believe was the truth ; but if he had not married Stella, Vanessa would have had him in spite of himself. When he went back to Ireland, his Ariadne,<sup>42</sup> not content to remain in her isle, pursued the fugitive Dean. In vain he protested, he vowed, he soothed, and bullied ; the news of the Dean's marriage with Stella at last came to her, and it killed her—she died of that passion.

And when she died, and Stella heard that Swift had written beautifully regarding her, 'That doesn't surprise me,' said Mrs. Stella, 'for we all know the Dean could write beautifully about a broomstick.' A woman—a true woman ! Would you have had one of them forgive the other ?

In a note in his biography, Scott says that his friend Doctor Tuke, of Dublin, has a lock of Stella's hair, enclosed in a paper by Swift, on which are written, in the Dean's hand, the words : 'Only a woman's hair.' An instance, says Scott, of the Dean's desire to veil his feelings under the mask of cynical indifference.

See the various notions of critics ! Do those words indicate indifference or an attempt to hide feeling ? Did you ever hear or read four words more pathetic ? 'Only a woman's hair' ; only love, only fidelity, only purity, innocence, beauty ; only the tenderest heart in the world stricken and wounded, and passed away now

W. M. THACKERAY

out of reach of pangs of hope deferred, love insulted, and pitiless desertion: only that lock of hair left; and memory and remorse, for the guilty lonely wretch, shuddering over the grave of his victim.

And yet to have had so much love, he must have given some. Treasures of wit and wisdom, and tenderness, too, must that man have had locked up in the caverns of his gloomy heart, and shown fitfully to one or two whom he took in there. But it was not good to visit that place. People did not remain there long, and suffered for having been there. He shrank away from all affections sooner or later. Stella and Vanessa both died near him, and away from him. He had not heart enough to see them die. He broke from his fastest friend, Sheridan;<sup>43</sup> he slunk away from his fondest admirer, Pope. His laugh jars on one's ear after seven score years. He was always alone—alone and gnashing in the darkness, except when Stella's sweet smile came and shone upon him. When that went, silence and utter night closed over him. An immense genius: an awful downfall and ruin. So great a man he seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling. We have other great names to mention—none, I think, however, so great or so gloomy.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

LIBRARY OF  
EWING CHRISTIAN COLLEGE  
ALLAHABAD



DAVID HUME

Dr. J. W. McCawley

1885

### III. DAVID HUME

(1711-1776)

IN what resides the most characteristic virtue of humanity? In good works? Possibly. In the creation of beautiful objects? Perhaps. But some would look in a different direction, and find it in detachment. To all such David Hume must be a great saint in the calendar; for no mortal being was ever more completely divested of the trammels of the personal and the particular, none ever practised with a more consummate success the divine art of impartiality. And certainly to have no axe to grind is something very noble and very rare. It may be said to be the antithesis of the bestial. A series of creatures might be constructed, arranged according to their diminishing interest in the immediate environment, which would begin with the amoeba and end with the mathematician. In pure mathematics the maximum of detachment appears to be reached: the mind moves in an infinitely complicated pattern, which is absolutely free from temporal considerations. Yet this very freedom—the essential condition of the mathematician's activity—perhaps gives him an unfair advantage. He can only be wrong—he cannot cheat. But the metaphysician can. The problems with which he deals are of overwhelming importance to himself and the rest of humanity; and it is his business to treat them with an exactitude as unbiased as if they were some puzzle in



## DAVID HUME .

the theory of numbers. That is his business—and his glory. In the mind of a Hume one can watch at one's ease this superhuman balance of contrasting opposites—the questions of so profound a moment, the answers of so supreme a calm. And the same beautiful quality may be traced in the current of his life, in which the wisdom of philosophy so triumphantly interpenetrated the vicissitudes of the mortal lot.

His history falls into three stages—youth, maturity, repose. The first was the most important. Had Hume died at the age of twenty-six his real work in the world would have been done, and his fame irrevocably established. Born in 1711, the younger son of a small Scottish landowner, he was very early dominated by that passion for literary pursuits which never left him for the rest of his life. When he was twenty-two one of those crises occurred—both physical and mental—which not uncommonly attack young men of genius when their adolescence is over, and determine the lines of their destiny. Hume was suddenly overcome by restlessness, ill-health, anxiety and hesitation. He left home, went to London, and then to Bristol, where, with the idea of making an independent fortune, he became a clerk in a merchant's office. 'But,' as he wrote long afterwards in his autobiography, 'in a few months I found that scene totally unsuitable to me.' No wonder; and then it was that, by a bold stroke of instinctive wisdom, he took the strange step which was the starting point of his career. He went to France, where he remained for three years—first at Rheims, then at La Flèche in Anjou—entirely alone, with only just money enough to support an extremely frugal

## LYTTON STRACHEY

existence, and with only the vaguest prospects before him. During those years he composed his *Treatise of Human Nature*, the masterpiece which contains all that is most important in his thought. The book opened a new era in philosophy. The last vestiges of theological prepossessions—which were still faintly visible in Descartes<sup>2</sup> and Locke<sup>3</sup> were discarded ; and reason, in all her strength and all her purity, came into her own. It is in the sense that Hume gives one of being committed absolutely to reason—of following wherever reason leads, with a complete, and even reckless, confidence—that the great charm of his writing consists. But it is not only that : one is not alone ; one is in the company of a supremely competent guide. With astonishing vigour, with heavenly lucidity, Hume leads one through the confusion and the darkness of speculation. One has got into an aeroplane, which has glided imperceptibly from the ground ; with thrilling ease one mounts and mounts ; and, supported by the mighty power of intellect, one looks out, to see the world below one, as one has never seen it before. In the *Treatise* there is something that does not appear again in Hume's work—a feeling of excitement—the excitement of discovery. At moments he even hesitates, and stands back, amazed at his own temerity.

The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what ? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what

## DAVID HUME.

condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.

And then his courage returns once more, and he speeds along on his exploration.

The *Treatise*, published in 1738, was a complete failure. For many years more Hume remained in poverty and insignificance. He eked out a living by precarious secretaryships, writing meanwhile a series of essays on philosophical, political and aesthetic subjects, which appeared from time to time in small volumes, and gradually brought him a certain reputation. It was not till he was over forty, when he was made librarian to the Faculty of Advocates<sup>4</sup> in Edinburgh, that his position became secure. The appointment gave him not only a small competence, but the command of a large library; and he determined to write the history of England—a task which occupied him for the next ten years.

The *History* was a great success; many editions were printed; and in his own day it was chiefly as a historian that Hume was known to the general public. After his death his work continued for many years the standard history of England, until, with a new age, new fields of knowledge were opened up and a new style of historical writing became fashionable. The book is highly typical of the eighteenth century. It was an attempt—one of the very earliest—to apply intelligence to the

events of the past. Hitherto, with very few exceptions (Bacon's *Henry the Seventh* was one of them) history had been in the hands of memoir writers like Commines and Clarendon, or moralists like Bossuet. Montesquieu<sup>5</sup> in his *Considerations sur les Romains*, had been the first to break the new ground ; but his book, brilliant, and weighty as it was, must be classed rather as a philosophical survey than a historical narration. Voltaire,<sup>6</sup> almost exactly contemporary with Hume, was indeed a master of narrative, but was usually too much occupied with discrediting Christianity to be a satisfactory historian. Hume had no such *arrière pensée* ; he only wished to tell the truth as he saw it, with clarity and elegance. And he succeeded. In his volumes—especially those on the Tudors and Stuarts—one may still find entertainment and even instruction. Hume was an extremely intelligent man, and anything that he had to say on English history could not fail to be worth attending to. But, unfortunately, mere intelligence is not itself quite enough to make a great historian. It was not simply that Hume's knowledge of his subject was insufficient—that an enormous number of facts, which have come into view since he wrote, have made so many of his statements untrue and so many of his comments unmeaning ; all that is serious, but it is not more serious than the circumstance that his cast of mind was in reality ill-fitted for the task he has undertaken. The virtues of a metaphysician are the vices of a historian. A generalized, colourless, unimaginative view of things is admirable when one is considering the law of causality, but one needs something else if one has to describe Queen Elizabeth.

## DAVID HUME

This fundamental weakness is materialized in the style of the *History*. Nothing could be more enchanting than Hume's style when he is discussing philosophical subjects. The grace and clarity of exquisite writing are enhanced by a touch of colloquialism—the tone of a polished conversation. A personality—a most engaging personality—just appears. The cat-like touches of ironic malice—hints of something very sharp behind the velvet—add to the effect. 'Nothing,' Hume concludes, after demolishing every argument in favour of the immortality of the soul, 'could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain the great and important truth.' The sentence is characteristic of Hume's writing at its best, where the pungency of the sense varies in direct proportion with the mildness of the expression. But such effects are banished from the *History*. A certain formality, which Hume doubtless supposed was required by the dignity of the subject, is interposed between the reader and the author; an almost completely latinized vocabulary makes vividness impossible; and a habit of *oratio obliqua* has a deadening effect. We shall never know exactly what Henry the Second said—in some uncouth dialect of French or English—in his final exasperation against Thomas of Canterbury; but it was certainly something about 'a set of fools and cowards', and 'vengeance', and an 'upstart clerk'. Hume, however, preferred to describe the scene as follows:—

The King himself being vehemently agitated, burst forth with an exclamation against his servants, whose want of

## LYTTON STRACHEY

zeal, he said, had so long left him exposed to the enterprises of that ungrateful and imperious prelate.

Such phrasing, in conjunction with the Middle Ages, is comic. The more modern centuries seem to provide a more appropriate field for urbanity, aloofness and common sense. The measured cynicism of Hume's comments on Cromwell, for instance, still makes good reading—particularly as a corrective to the *O altitudo* !<sup>7</sup> sentimentalities of Carlyle.

Soon after his completion of the *History* Hume went to Paris as the Secretary to the English Ambassador. He was now a celebrity, and French Society fell upon him with delirious delight. He was flattered by princes, worshipped by fine ladies, and treated as an oracle by the *philosophes*.<sup>8</sup> To such an extent did he become the fashion that it was at last positively *de rigueur*<sup>9</sup> to have met him, and a lady who, it was discovered, had not even seen the great philosopher, was banished from Court. His appearance, so strangely out of keeping with mental agility, added to the fascination. 'His face,' wrote one of his friends, 'was broad and flat, his mouth wide, and without any other expression than that of imbecility. His eyes vacant and spiritless, and the corpulence of his whole person was far better fitted to communicate the idea of a turtle-eating alderman than of a refined philosopher.' All this was indeed delightful to the French. They loved to watch the awkward affability of the uncouth figure, to listen in rapt attention to the extraordinary French accent, and when, one evening, at a party, the adorable man appeared in a charade<sup>10</sup> as a sultan between two lovely ladies and could only say, as he

## DAVID HUME

struck his chest, over and over again, '*Eh bien, mesdemoiselles, eh bien, vous voila, donc!*'<sup>11</sup> their ecstasy reached its height. It seemed indeed almost impossible to believe in this combination of the outer and inner man. Even his own mother never got below the surface. 'Our Davie', she is reported to have said, 'is a fine good-natured cratur, but uncommon wake-minded.' In no sense whatever was this true. Hume was not only brilliant as an abstract thinker and a writer; he was no less competent in the practical affairs of life. In the absence of the Ambassador he was left in Paris for some months as *chargé d'affaires*,<sup>12</sup> and his dispatches still exist to show that he understood diplomacy as well as ratiocination.

Entirely unmoved by the raptures of Paris, Hume returned to Edinburgh, at last a prosperous and wealthy man. For seven years he lived in his native capital, growing comfortably old amid leisure, books, and devoted friends. It is to this final period of his life that those pleasant legends belong which reveal the genial charm, the happy temperament, of the philosopher. There is the story of the tallow-chandler's wife, who arrived to deliver a monitory message from on high, but was diverted from her purpose by a tactful order for an enormous number of candles. There is the well-known tale of the weighty philosopher getting stuck in the boggy ground at the base of the Castle rock,<sup>13</sup> and calling on a passing old woman to help him out. She doubted whether any help should be given to the author of the *Essay on Miracles*.<sup>14</sup> 'But, my good woman, does not your religion as a Christian teach you to do good, even to your enemies?' 'That may



## LYTTON STRACHEY

be,' was the reply, 'but ye shall na get out of that till ye become a Christian yorsell: and repeat the Lord's Prayer and the Belief'<sup>15</sup>—a feat that was accomplished with astonishing alacrity. And there is the vision of the mountainous metaphysician seated, amid a laughing party of young ladies, on a chair that was too weak for him, and suddenly subsiding to the ground.

In 1776, when Hume was sixty-five, an internal complaint, to which he had long been subject, completely undermined his health, and recovery became impossible. For many months he knew he was dying, but his mode of life remained unaltered, and, while he gradually grew weaker, his cheerfulness continued unabated. With ease, with gaiety, with the simplicity of perfect taste, he gently welcomed the inevitable. This wonderful equanimity lasted till the very end. There was no ostentation of stoicism, much less any Addisonian dotting of death-bed i's.<sup>16</sup> Not long before he died he amused himself by writing his autobiography—a model of pointed brevity. In one of his last conversations—it was with Adam Smith<sup>17</sup>—he composed an imaginary conversation between himself and Charon,<sup>18</sup> after the manner of Lucian:—

'Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the Public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition.' But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. 'You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy, loitering rogue.'



## DAVID HUME

Within a few days of his death he wrote a brief letter to his old friend, the Comtesse de Boufflers ; " it was the final expression of a supreme detachment. ' My disorder,' he said, ' is a diarrhœa, or disorder in my bowels, which has been gradually undermining me these two years ; but, within these six months, has been visibly hastening me to my end. I see death approach gradually, without anxiety or regret. I salute you, with great affection and regard, for the last time.'

LYTTON STRACHEY

THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY



## IV. THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

(1800-1859)

## I

To name Macaulay is to awaken one's own youth. To enjoy Macaulay is to be able to enter into the enjoyments of youth: the rich colours, the sounding drums and trumpets, the direct tales and the simple explanations of youth. As one grows older one finds that neither are tales so direct nor explanations so simple as Macaulay, in his history, his politics, and his criticism, tended to make them. Even his poetry errs, if it errs, by taking on a certain false simplicity; even to die for one's country is a little more complicated than the jingle of his rhymes and the clangour of his lines make it seem. But, though we can agree that entire truth is not in him, yet flaming colour and echoing sound are triumphantly in him; and the wise mind, adult or child, will enjoy those things, and all else that it can find, as thoroughly as it can.

He was born on 25th October 1800, the 395th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt. It was the kind of battle and the kind of victory which was peculiarly suitable to him; and the bravery of the verse in which Shakespeare in *Henry V* embodied it, was peculiarly suitable to his imagination also. He was not really so simple, nor was Shakespeare, as to suppose that the 'ten thousand French'<sup>2</sup> of that remarkable bulletin were slain at the cost of only twenty-nine

English. But though his own pictures were more life-like, yet he loved to paint after that great example; the relief of Londonderry, the battle of Killiecrankie, in the *History*, or the cry of Aulus the Dictator in the *Lake Regillus*—‘The foe begins to yield’—are examples. And if, as he grew older, he enjoyed his birthday, he also enjoyed those other things that he was afterwards to use so effectively—words. He took that double pleasure in their sound and their meaning which writers of any worth always have, and though his ideas might be limited the instruments which expressed them were not. He gathered them and enjoyed them; the longer words the better, for there was more sound and colour. Lying on the hearthrug in front of the fire, from the age of three, he read passionately, and what he read he used. Hannah More,<sup>3</sup> calling one day, was received with an invitation to have a glass of ‘old spirits’; *Robinson Crusoe* had supplied the enchanting drink. A maid moved a border of oyster-shells which he had set to mark his own plot of ground. He went into the drawing-room where his mother was entertaining company, and declaimed solemnly: ‘Curst be Sally, for curst is he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark’<sup>4</sup>; the Bible had given him that magnificent denunciation. From a more general reading came the phrase in which, when a servant had upset hot coffee over his legs, the small child thanked a kind and anxious hostess; exquisitely courteous, he said solemnly: ‘Thank you, madam, the agony is abated.’

His memory was prodigious; it retained words, poems, facts, and as many ideas as his mind could contain. He remembered the history of the world,

## CHARLES WILLIAMS

and it was for him expressed in two mediums, (i) knowledge, (ii) belief. Those two capacities all his life contended unconsciously within him. He believed that the world, all by itself, was growing better; that civilization was spreading, and inevitably, and almost inexorably, conferring benefits on humanity; that humanity's business, generally speaking, was to let it alone to spread; that, in consequence, the age in which he lived was the best, but that the next age would be automatically better; and that, of that present age, the constitutional and social arrangements of England were the finest expression. His father and his father's friends had belonged to what was called the 'Clapham sect'—a group of devout Evangelicals who beheld in history the expression of the immutable judgements, mercies, and decrees of God. It might be said that Macaulay toned down God but kept the immutability of progress. They had fought for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the freedom of the slaves, thus removing what was apparently the last fixed legal barrier to a universal advance towards felicity. That Macaulay identified positive felicity with the removal of positive ills was, no doubt, his error. It may, however, be added that, even so, the removal of positive ills is a matter of some importance to mankind. Many people have blamed Macaulay who are less vivid in their sense of the ills and no more vivid in their imagination of spiritual felicity.

2

School, Cambridge, the Bar, journalism, the House of Commons followed, and on them followed Holland.

*Holland House* THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

House.<sup>6</sup> 'The chief turn of nineteenth century England,' says Mr. Chesterton, 'was taken about the time when a footman at Holland House opened a door and announced Mr. Macaulay.' Macaulay himself describes the event in a letter to his sister<sup>7</sup> :—

Take it dramatically in the German style.

*Fine morning. Scene, the great entrance of Holland House.*

*Enter MACAULAY and TWO FOOTMEN in livery.*

*First Footman.*—Sir, may I venture to demand your name?

*Macaulay.*—Macaulay, and thereto I add M.P.  
And that addition, even in these proud halls,  
May well ensure the bearer some respect.

*Second Footman.*—And art thou come to breakfast with our Lord?

*Macaulay.*—I am : for so his hospitable will,  
And hers—the peerless dame ye serve—hath bade.

*First Footman.*—Ascend the stair, and thou above shalt find,

On snow-white linen spread, the luscious meal.

*(Exit MACAULAY upstairs.)*

In plain English prose, I went this morning to breakfast at Holland House. The day was fine, and I arrived at twenty minutes after ten.

It was, in fact, the union of the great Whig families which had throughout the eighteenth century been as much the Families as the Tories, with the middle classes. For another alliance so memorable, and this time on the Tory side, history had to wait ten years, from 1831 to 1841, when Mr. Disraeli became a Tory. The aristocratic government of England had then on all sides allied itself with those who would have been its



## CHARLES WILLIAMS

conquerors, were it not that both they and it were, before the grand progressive advance towards freedom and comfort had been properly begun, to be dominated by the extremely wealthy groups which arose within it. The advance towards comfort has, on the whole, continued; the advance towards social freedom has, on the whole, stopped. Spiritual freedom has remained as it was and always must be—an achievement only gained by intense labour and discipline.

In the eighteenth century great place was the patron of talent, and talent—even genius—had to find patronage in order to work and even to exist. But talent was now beginning to have a little money of its own, and the terms of that ancient alliance were altered. Johnson had written, years before:

But mark what ills the scholar's life assail  
Toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail.<sup>8</sup>

But the young Mr. Macaulay was in no danger of want or the jail; toil he thoroughly enjoyed, and envy was negligible. The patron had to change his tone. Genius in England has always resided in the smaller houses of the middle classes and it was genius—especially journalistic genius—of which the great families were now in growing need. The time had not yet arrived when it would be their fate either to fear or to own the newspapers; indeed, the newspapers, as yet, were not. But the great Reviews were—the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, *Blackwood's*; and Mr. Macaulay was a valued contributor to the *Edinburgh*. He was invited, and he went, to breakfast at Holland House. Lord Russell, of another great Whig family,

## THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

was there. They gave him 'very good coffee, and very good tea, and very good eggs, butter kept in the midst of ice, and hot rolls'. Lord Holland (in a wheel chair) showed him the pictures; Lady Holland showed him more; Mr. Luttrell, a wit, a scholar, a poet, and an intimate of the house, showed him the gardens.

The connexion so happily begun prospered. By 11 July Macaulay was dining and sleeping at Holland House, 'a very agreeable and splendid party'. He met the Duke and Duchess of Richmond, and a greater than they—M. de Talleyrand, who had been First Minister to Napoleon and to the Bourbons who supplanted Napoleon. He was driven back to London by Lord John Russell, another scion of the great house and a future Prime Minister. Macaulay's personal appearance about this time was described by a friend, a political enemy, and a spectator. The friend wrote: 'A short, manly figure, marvellously upright . . . a massive head, and features of a powerful and rugged cast.' The spectator said, 'He has a good face,—not the delicate features of a man of genius and sensibility, but the strong lines and well-knit limbs of a man sturdy in body and mind. Very eloquent and cheerful. Overflowing with words and not poor in thought . . . He seems a correct as well as a full man.' The enemy wrote (in *Blackwood's Magazine*, a Tory organ): 'A little, splay-footed, ugly dumpling of a fellow, with a mouth from ear to ear.' Macaulay's own controversial habits were finer; he fought hard, but he fought the mind with the mind, and he never used insults instead of argument—even to anyone whom (as he said of one opponent), 'I detest more than cold boiled veal.'

## CHARLES WILLIAMS

He was by now a power in journalism ; he was becoming a power in politics. . In 1832 he was given a minor office under the Whig Government, and took part in the final passage of the Emancipation of the Slaves. Meanwhile a new India Bill, to regulate the affairs of the East India Company, had been passed, and had decreed that one of the members of the Supreme Council was to be chosen from outside the servants of the Company. The Directors of the Company appointed Macaulay by nineteen votes to three. He determined to accept, and made his arrangements. He inquired from a returned Anglo-Indian about the mosquitoes. ' Always contrive,' was the answer, ' to have at your table some flashy blooming young writer or cadet, just come out, that the mosquitoes may stick to him, and leave the rest of the company alone.' He arranged with the editor of the *Edinburgh* to be paid for his articles, while he was away, not in money but in books. He bought and read books on India—and (as always) on everything else. Lady Holland went into hysterics ; Lord Holland rebuked her for selfishness. He sailed in February 1834.

### 3

On the way out, he said, ' except at meals I hardly exchanged a word with any human being. I never was left for so long a time so completely to my own resources ; and I am glad to say that I found them quite sufficient to keep me cheerful and employed.' It was one way of putting it ; his resources were the reserves of his mind and the preserves of his books. He read ' the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil, Horace, Caesar's

## THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

*Commentaries*, Bacon's *De Augmentis*, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, *Don Quixote*, Gibbon's *Rome*, Mill's *India*, all the seventy volumes of Voltaire, Sismondi's *History of France*, and the seven thick folios of the *Biographia Britannica*.<sup>9</sup> So burdened and bursting with the West's vital enjoyment of the West he descended on India and on the Supreme Council. But he brought with him what perhaps the Supreme Council lacked rather than India; an immense feeling for the authority of the past and of the great men and things of the past, and an immense feeling for high achievement. His correspondence is full of that apprehension: 'I was enraptured . . .', 'I was enchanted . . .', 'I never enjoyed it so much . . .' There is a vignette of him in one of his later letters which deserves to be remembered. In 1849 he was going to Ireland. Between London and Bangor he had read the lives of the Roman Emperors, but on the boat at night he could not see to read. There was magnificent starlight; he sat on deck and repeated to himself *Paradise Lost*. 'I could still repeat half of it, and that the best half. I really never enjoyed it so much.' When Macaulay is remembered for blame, that scene should be remembered also to his honour: the short stocky figure, wrapped in a greatcoat, sitting alone on deck under the glory of the stars, and abandoning himself to the unutterable other glory of the most sublime verse that the English genius has ever made.

In India he carried on his picturesque veneration—races, States, writings and buildings offered themselves to him; and travelling in the subdued pomp of a Member of Council he admired the antique pomp which

## CHARLES WILLIAMS

he now so nearly neighboured. But he also threw himself into affairs. Over a question of legal administration he was violently attacked by the *Calcutta Press*. He wrote that 'We know that India cannot have a free government. But she may have the next best thing—a firm and impartial despotism.' Into the last five words went all his historical knowledge and all his real intelligence; he meant despotism, but also he meant impartial. The opposition which he met with seemed to him to come from 'two or three hundred people' who wanted 'to domineer over millions'. He, and the Government, remained firm, and the opposition failed.

He was appointed President of the Committee of Public Instruction, and found the Committee divided—five against five—on the secular<sup>10</sup> question of the kind of education which was most desirable. Five wanted to encourage Sanscrit, Persian, Arabic; five wanted English. Macaulay adopted the view which has generally prevailed in the history of Europe: that the culture of the ruling class is made the doctrine of the ruled. He wrote a Minute such as no one else could write, throbbing with his own sincere belief in the civilization of the West, enlarged by his extraordinary knowledge of that civilization, shaped into the coherent and lucid sentences which are one of the chief gifts of that civilization to its obedient children. It swept the Government and the Governor-General away on its own intensity of conviction. It was determined that 'the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India'. The Indian millions were to

## THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

become millions of Indian Macaulays—at best and with necessary variations. But they were to be the best Macaulays; they were to be alive with all the vitality of European imagination, not merely frigid with European pedantry. *Robinson Crusoe* 'is worth all the grammars of rhetoric and logic in the world'. Macaulay, revisiting the glimpses of his Indian moon, might not be very satisfied—a hundred years after—with our results. Our slightly sardonic comfort is that he would have been even less satisfied with results in England. Somehow the automatic machine of progress has functioned to strange and different ends.

He was President of the Law Commission, and had much to do with producing the first draft of a Penal Code which was greatly admired by lawyers. He left India in 1838, having profoundly affected its future, and having also—the famous incident must be mentioned—provoked the whole of the circle of the Governor-General one rainy season in the Nilgiris to read *Clarissa Harlowe*.<sup>11</sup> 'The Governor's wife seized the book; the Secretary waited for it; the Chief Justice could not read it for tears.' But Richardson without Macaulay might easily have left that supreme circle at Ootacamund uninterested. He was infectious; he invigorated taste by his mere contact.

### 4

English historians are roughly divisible into two classes: those whose style is thrilled through and through by their subject and those whose style remains



unmoved by it. Accuracy and inaccuracy are as likely to occur on one side as the other ; the picturesque is not necessarily opposed to learning, and where exaltation and learning are mingled the result is far more likely to correspond to truth than the more pedestrian journey along a flat road of unvaried statement. The uninflected statement of fact, in history as in everything else, may be sometimes necessary. But it avoids any reflection of the emotion which accompanied the original fact. The flight of James II is in that prose more placid than ever in reality ; the death of Dundee<sup>22</sup> is sedater than any death could be, let alone one that followed on the charge of the Highland clans. It is the vibrating truth of the fact which the historian with a sufficient style recaptures. Even if it is a fact which he hates and denounces, still the denunciation itself brings the reader by its fervour nearer to history than uninterested frigidity. Certainly we need accuracy and impartiality. But impartiality does not mean a failure to understand anybody so much as a capacity to understand everybody. So great a sympathy Macaulay hardly possessed, but he thrilled, and his prose thrilled, to heroism, magnificence, honour, and magnanimity.

He returned to London in 1839. He re-entered public and Parliamentary life and was made Secretary for War. In 1846 he became Paymaster-General, but in the next year he was defeated at Edinburgh and retired into 'private life'. His private life was to become the field in which grew the harvest of the *History of England*—private is hardly the word for a field in which generations have gathered grain.



In 1842 he had published the *Lays of Ancient Rome*; Leigh Hunt,<sup>13</sup> then nearing sixty years, wrote to him, 'asking me to lend him money, and lamenting that my verses want the true poetical aroma which breathes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*'. There is perhaps no English poem which the *Lays* are less like than the *Faerie Queene*, unless it were that other poem which a young friend of Leigh Hunt's had fashioned at Hampstead, while Macaulay was still at Trinity—the *Ode to the Nightingale*. They have no poetic depth and no poetic significance. One reviewer wrote that Macaulay 'robbed in the face of day'. From whom? From Homer. It is merely silly. The comparison, for good or evil, of the *Lays* with the great poetic achievements is like comparing Macaulay with Caesar or Thucydides. His verse has no more depth of passion than it has subtlety of movement. It is the verse of poetic childhood. But in becoming adult in poetry we need not leave childhood behind, and we can enjoy flagrancy, gusto, and splendid names without either persuading ourselves that they are, or lamenting that they are not, more.

In 1838, looking forward to his return to England, he had looked forward also to beginning his *History*. On 9 March 1839 he wrote in his Journal:<sup>14</sup> 'I began my *History* with a sketch of the early revolutions of England. Pretty well; but a little too stately and rhetorical.' In 1841 he had settled to it. He was shocked to think that some people could not repeat the names of the Prime Ministers of England from 1688 to 1789 in order; he aimed at producing something 'which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable

novel on the tables of young ladies'. These are the two elements of Macaulay's mind. He did know all about the Prime Ministers, and he saw no reason why they should not be as exciting to the young ladies as they undoubtedly were to him. He gave up time and energy to making them so, and he succeeded. The first two volumes appeared at the end of 1848; within four months thirteen thousand copies had been sold—even nowadays it would not be a poor achievement. Congratulations poured in on him. The Duke of Wellington admired it. The Quakers objected to the treatment of Penn;<sup>15</sup> Macaulay received a deputation and maintained his case. He walked in Fleet Street and saw in a bookseller's window an edition of Hume's *History* marked 'highly valuable as an introduction to Macaulay'. 'I laughed so convulsively that the other people who were staring at the books took me for a poor demented gentleman.' But they did not know him. Where he was known he became a spectacle, he who loved spectacles. But as he loved them with humour and intelligence, so he laughed at himself.

I have seen the hippopotamus, both asleep and awake; and I can assure you that, awake or asleep, he is the ugliest of the works of God. But you must hear of my triumphs. Thackeray swears that he was eye-witness and ear-witness of the proudest event of my life. Two damsels were just about to pass that doorway which we, on Monday, in vain attempted to enter, when I was pointed out to them. 'Mr. Macaulay!' cried the lovely pair. 'Is that Mr. Macaulay? Never mind the hippopotamus.' And having paid a shilling to see Behemoth,<sup>16</sup> they left him in the very moment at which he was about to display himself to them.

## THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

in order to see—but spare my modesty. I can wish for nothing more on earth, now, that Madame Tussaud,<sup>17</sup> in whose Pantheon I hoped once for a place, is dead.

Some such public admiration, with its disadvantages, was his for the rest of his life. Palmerston in 1857 made him a peer. Less famous persons continually pestered him for money or with verses and other work. An unknown painter wrote to him, ‘adjuring me, as I love the fine arts, to hire or buy him a cow to paint from’. An unknown writer offered to bring up the manuscript of his novel from Scotland if he were sent £50. In 1859 Macaulay went to Scotland for a fortnight; from where he wrote:—

I went the day before yesterday to Grasmere Churchyard, and saw Wordsworth’s tomb. I thought of announcing my intention of going, and issuing guinea tickets to people who wished to see me there. For a Yankee who was here a few days ago, and heard that I was expected, said that he would give the world to see that most sublime of all spectacles, Macaulay standing by the grave of Wordsworth.<sup>18</sup>

His labour, his fame, and his enjoyment, went on till the end of his life. Toward the end of that same year 1859 he was working regularly, having reached the year 1700, but by the December his health was breaking. The last entry in his journal is on 23 December, a comment on Dickens; on the 28th he signed his last letter, to a poor curate, sending him £25; on the same day late in the evening he was found dead in his library, the latest *Cornhill* open on the table by him. He was buried in Westminster Abbey; it was perhaps excusable.

He remains one of the stumbling blocks of criticism. He is liked yet disapproved, and read a little shamefacedly—except in prose anthologies. The austere part of the reader's mind deprecates at once his style and his convictions, not altogether unwisely. One remembers that Arnold was scornful of the *Lays*,<sup>19</sup> and willing to make them a test of good judgement in verse; and as it is clear at once that Arnold had a finer mind than Macaulay it is difficult not to regret liking them. But it remains a little difficult not to like them—and the *Essays*—and the *History*—and, in short, everything.

His only real instrument was the trumpet; his only good colour purple. But he had a great instinct for knowing how long to blow the one and how much to put on of the other: a single blast or a fanfare, a delicate pattern or a magnificent sweep. He admired spectacles, and his style is spectacular. It is directed, not by intellect, not by profound emotion, but by proper names and heroic admirations, and while it is in action it subordinates if it does not impress us. The poem on the Armada takes us through England with the glare of the beacons and the ringing of bells. The *History* takes us through the Revolution to the marching of mobs and the defeat of kings. Even when he disapproves he pays tribute—to the death of the Jacobite Dundee or the splendour of Louis the Sun-King.<sup>20</sup> And between these multitudinous moments he is always active. His proper names are facts, rather than myths. Even the gods in *Lake Regillus* are champions rather than deities; they create an unholy, but hardly a holy fear, in the hearts of their enemies.

THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

It may be that he does not stop to think, but it must be admitted that his movement prevents us also from stopping. He compels us to say Ah ha! among the trumpets,<sup>21</sup> and we say it even to his own. There is no single page in him where he can give any food for his reader's mind. But also there are few pages during which the reader does not forget that he is hungry.

CHARLES WILLIAMS

RICHARD COBDEN





## V. RICHARD COBDEN<sup>1</sup>

(1804-1865)

SOME thirty years ago two young men were travelling on one of the old horse trams through the melancholy streets of Camden Town.<sup>2</sup> 'How just,' said one, of them, 'was the instinct that prompted Cobden's friends to put up his statue on the doorstep of this district. Here, if anywhere, is Cobden's England: this drab, colourless, dingy squalor, with nothing to take a man's mind from the dreary business of making money.' 'It is odd,' said the other, 'that you should say this at this moment, for it was only yesterday that Morley<sup>3</sup> remarked that there were three English statesmen who stood out in the nineteenth century as men of original and commanding views: two of them were Disraeli and Gladstone, the third was Cobden.'

The great interest of Cobden's career is that, though the second of these views would be accepted to-day by all serious critics, all discriminating admirers would admit that the first is not wholly false. For while those who deplore Cobden's influence in English politics would have to admit that the state of Europe when he died shows that he was a man of remarkable power, those who admire his spirit and achievements will allow that it is not altogether a coincidence that a time when the Manchester School<sup>4</sup> was drawing upon itself the eyes of the world, the streets of Manchester were so mean and miserable that a magistrate of the Roman

## RICHARD COBDEN

Empire in the days of Antonines<sup>5</sup> would have been ashamed to call it his native city.

The most dramatic and the most familiar way of looking at the domestic history of the first half of the nineteenth century is to regard it as an epic struggle between the landlords and the manufacturers, between the spirit of feudalism and the spirits of commerce. Cobden, as a protagonist in that struggle, is regarded as a man of business. In this there lurks a danger. If we think of commerce to-day we think of offices and banks, of business men dictating to typists, of clerks making up ledgers, of a brisk but sedentary life spent in Manchester or London or some other great city. Of course, all this life can be clothed with romance, if you picture these men and women moving in fancy from one continent to another, watching the rise and fall of prices at the ends of the world, thinking at one moment of coffee in Brazil, at another of rubber in the Malay Archipelago.

But commerce in history has a more exciting aspect than this. The merchant in the Middle Ages did not merely visit the ends of the earth in imagination, he visited them in his caravan. He was the man of action, the man of adventure. At home he had all the prestige and popularity of the traveller who can tell his neighbours what life is like somewhere else ; how people keep themselves, what are their habits, their manners, their religion. Such a man was more like Herodotus<sup>6</sup> than Mr. Marshall or Mr. Snelgrove. He was more like Strabo than Mr. Swan or Mr. Edgar. He was the travelled man, the experienced man, the man of wide interests and outlook, for, like Odysseus,<sup>7</sup> he had seen

J. L. HAMMOND

many men and many cities. And at a time when newspapers and newspaper readers were much less common, the traveller occupied a very important place in society. Man is always curious about man. To-day there is a new interest in archaeology just because we seem to have ransacked and to have standardized the whole world, and it is only by unburying the past that we can learn about peoples that differ from those with which we are familiar. That is why new light on Troy and Mycenae, which could take Gladstone's mind from his most pressing public cares in the first days of Schliemann's discoveries,<sup>8</sup> stirs curiosity and excitement to-day in the man in the street. But a century ago that kind of curiosity was satisfied by travellers from Turkey or China or—

Golden cities, ten months' journeys deep  
Amid Tartarean hills.<sup>9</sup>

To speak of Cobden as a business man, putting himself at the head of a business party, is misleading, unless we remember that he belonged to commerce in this special and romantic tradition. He was the most travelled man in the House of Commons. Nobody among his contemporaries had seen so much of the world, or talked to so many of its rulers and its merchants, its politicians and its peasants. He knew Europe in its diplomatic politics as Stanhope<sup>10</sup> knew it at the beginning of the eighteenth and Castlereagh at the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, but he knew Europe also in its underlying passions and submerged desires, an aspect of which Stanhope and Castlereagh knew relatively little. To understand his power and

## RICHARD COBDEN

his ideas, we must remember that he became a great leader, not because he was a business man, as we understand the term, but because, travelling in muslins, he could collect the wisdom that comes with experience to alert and observant minds. By nature an adventurous man, a man, that is, eager for a wide and various experience, he was always on the look out for the significance of the world which, at any given moment, he found himself observing.

If he had not possessed this quality, he would never have overcome his early disadvantages. He was one of eleven children, born under the shadow of family disaster. He was educated by an uncle at a school in Yorkshire, where he remained for five years, 'a grim and desolate time', 'ill-fed, ill-taught, ill-used'. His chance came when his uncle, who was in business, sent him to Ireland and Scotland as a commercial traveller. He made so good an impression that, although his uncle's firm came to grief in the financial storm of 1826,<sup>11</sup> he was offered a partnership in a merchant's house. Seeing that the repeal of the heavy excise duties on calicoes would stimulate that industry, he turned calico printer.<sup>12</sup> But though his business prospered for a time, it came to misfortune later. This was not surprising. The ordinary business man spends his time making himself into a better business man: Cobden spent his time making himself into a politician. He worked hard at his own education. As a clerk in his uncle's warehouse he learned French; as a partner in a merchant's business in Manchester he studied Latin and mathematics. Like all reformers of his type, he read widely and eagerly. He became an admirable

writer, and though the play he offered to the manager of Covent Garden<sup>13</sup> as a young man did not deserve, Lord Morley tells us,<sup>14</sup> more than the slight and slighting consideration that it received, his letters on his travels are agreeable reading, reflecting the play of a mind that soon finds itself at home in a new atmosphere, and settles down to look about and understand new and unfamiliar surroundings.

Thus Cobden was a calico printer in the sense that Grote was a banker.<sup>15</sup> His fundamental interest was not in muslins and cottons, but in the men and women of the world. He resembled Marco Polo or Jonas Hanway<sup>16</sup> more than he resembled the Manchester merchants who helped him to repeal the Corn Laws.<sup>17</sup> This came out clearly enough when his friends, rightly thinking it a scandal that a man who had given to public causes the most persuasive tongue in England should suffer personal shipwreck from neglect of his affairs, came to his rescue as Fox's<sup>18</sup> friends had come to the rescue of that noble spendthrift half a century earlier. Cobden, with a map of Illinois before him and a fortune in his pocket, was about as good a business man as Fox when he sat down to the faro table at Brooks's,<sup>19</sup> fingering all that was left of his father's plunder. Cobden threw his fortune into the Mississippi<sup>20</sup> with the generosity of a man whose imagination moves faster than the facts.

Cobden's optimism, his habit of letting his imagination outrun the facts, blinded him to the truth that if he lacked the business man's prudence, the business men whom he summoned to his banner lacked his large outlook. There was a wide and ultimately fatal

## RICHARD COBDEN

difference between leader and led. This was plain from the outset of his career. The first thing Cobden did when he became a calico printer was to agitate for a village school; the first cause he took up was the cause of education. When he went into public life he meant to devote to this cause the incomparable gifts of persuasion which were ultimately given to the cause of Free Trade. But he was indifferently supported. Many of the business men in the North of England had the kind of self-satisfaction which is produced by success that has been gained in the face of great difficulties. Some of them were large-minded enough to prize the education which they had missed, but most of them were doubtful whether the education which they had not found necessary for their own development was worth much public money or much public effort. Another difficulty was the extreme sectarian spirit of the times. Most Churchmen and most Nonconformists preferred that the towns should be left in ignorance if the alternative was a form of education of which they disapproved. In this intolerant world of the few men such as Cobden and Hook,<sup>21</sup> the great Vicar of Leeds, who put education first, believing, as Cobden said, that Cicero and Seneca<sup>22</sup> had done greater service to humanity than the average gladiator or peasant of their time, although neither Churchman nor Nonconformist would have approved of their education, made little impression.

Another great obstacle to the civilization of the new towns, as Dickens saw,<sup>23</sup> was the Sunday imposed on the working classes, a Sunday in which the church or chapel and the public-house offered them their only

escape from their dwellings in the slums. Every visitor from the Continent was astonished to find that beauty, fresh air, music, and reasonable recreation was kept out of the reach of the working classes on the only day on which they had leisure. We know what Cobden thought of this bleak barbarous institution from the letter he wrote in Germany. 'If you think this is an improper picture of a Protestant Sunday,' he wrote to his sister, 'on the other hand, the sober and orderly German thinks that drunkenness, the filthy public-houses, the miserable and moping mechanic that pines in his dark alley in our English cities on the Sabbath day, are infinitely worse features of a Protestant community than his Tivoli Gardens.'<sup>24</sup> Here again there was a wide difference between leader and led.

Cobden was blind to this difference. His outlook was coloured and dominated by his buoyant nature. He was an optimist, and his optimism resembled that of Macaulay<sup>25</sup> both in its range and in its source. A century ago Macaulay, criticizing Southey's pessimism<sup>26</sup> made a guess about the state of England in 1930. 'If we were to prophesy,' he said, 'that in the year 1930 a population of fifty millions, better fed, clad, and lodged than the English of our time, will cover these islands, that Sussex and Huntingdonshire will be wealthier than the richest parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire now are, that cultivation, such as that of a flower garden, will be carried up to the very tops of Ben Nevis and Helvellyn, that machines constructed on principles undiscovered will be in every house, that there will be no highways but railroads, no travelling but by steam, that our debt, vast as it seems to us,



## RICHARD COBDEN

will appear to our great-grandchildren a trifling encumbrance which might easily be paid off in a year or two, many people would think us insane.

Macaulay went on to say that he would not prophesy, but he asked his readers to imagine how a person who had predicted the England of 1830 would have appeared to the Parliament which met in perplexity and terror after the South Sea Bubble crash<sup>27</sup> of 1720. What would that Parliament have thought of a picture of England in which men would be in the habit of sailing without wind and beginning to ride without horses, and in which the annual revenue would equal the principal of the debt which that Parliament considered an intolerable burden?

Cobden, as he moved about, felt towards all the new energy in the world as Macaulay felt. He was not one of those men who have no eyes for the life of the past. When he stood before the Parthenon<sup>28</sup> he declared that his own age could not match such beauty of design or perfection of workmanship. Disraeli, speaking in the House of Commons after his death, said that reverence for the past was one of his distinguishing characteristics. But he found the vitality of his own age expressed and symbolized in this new power. He believed that the Industrial Revolution had done what the French Revolution had done, that it had shaken 'the dead from living man'. Looking at this world, he made in politics the same mistake that he made in business. He gambled on the virtues of a class. He thought that if you could put on one side all that belonged to the dead world, and throw power to the class that had come to life in this new world, England

would be guided and governed by the energy of a new and generous public spirit. Cobden, in fact, was ready to stake everything on his belief that the British mill-owners and the British bankers and the British tradesmen would create a new city life recalling the city life of Italy or Flanders in the great days of Michelangelo or Rembrandt.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, large numbers of the new class resembled Charlotte Brontë's neighbours, as described by Mrs. Gaskell<sup>30</sup> :—

Men with hundreds of thousands of pounds who bring up their sons with only just enough learning to qualify them for overseers during their father's lifetime and greedy, grasping money-hunters after his death.

These gentlemen, it will be remembered, defeated the efforts of Charlotte Brontë's father to obtain a water-supply for Haworth, and Cobden was expecting them to emulate the munificence of Cosmo de' Medici.<sup>31</sup> Those who formed larger views for their families did not always form larger views for their towns. Cobden lived to deplore the haste with which business men who made fortunes turned themselves into country gentlemen, neglecting the claims of their city life. He was let down by the merchant princes as Disraeli was let down by the landlords. Disraeli, looking for a Herodes Atticus<sup>32</sup> among the landlords, who grew fabulously richer with every new smudge on the face of Lancashire, found his followers voting steadily against Bills for Public Health, abandoned his mission in despair for twenty years, and gave his brains to the tactics of his party.

## RICHARD COBDEN

When we look from England to the world, Cobden's place in history becomes clearer. That strong sense for the unity of civilization for which we look in the world of science and culture, struggles against special obstacles in the world of politics, for politicians have to manage the mixed passions of class and nation, of religion and race. Those obstacles grew more difficult in the nineteenth century as popular feeling and national sentiment became stronger forces.

The sense for the unity of the world which had inspired the mystical poetry of the thirteenth century<sup>33</sup> dominated the cold prose of the eighteenth century, revealing itself in the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and *The Wealth of Nations*. Cobden had learnt from Adam Smith to look upon commerce in this relation. He saw, as he surveyed its history, that the discoveries of Columbus<sup>34</sup> and the other great mariners had been followed by two centuries of struggle, and that the passionate desire for the new wealth of the world had turned the Atlantic into as lawless a sea as the Mediterranean in the savage days of Mithridates.<sup>35</sup> To the ordinary business man this was idle history. He was for British commerce. If commerce flourished by peace, he was for peace; if by war, he was for war. To Cobden that past was a haunting shadow. For the things to which many of those who followed him were indifferent were just the things that mattered to him above everything else. Just as in education and religious tolerance, so in commerce he moved in a world beyond their understanding. The discovery that guided and governed Cobden's mind was a truth too important for anybody who had grasped it to give it

half-hearted service. The British people, as the pioneers of the Industrial Revolution, had created an economy which made the whole world one. In such a world strife must be more disastrous than in a world where nations still lived on their own resources. It must also be more frequent, for just as the penalties of defeat would be more severe, so would the prizes of victory seem more tempting. While many of his followers were merely thinking of free trade as a means of adding to Britain's commerce and riches, Cobden's mind was brooding on this prospect. He called on the British people to help the world out of this danger by renouncing monopoly; by throwing open its markets; by declaring that the British Empire welcomed anybody who wanted to trade with it. In this way he hoped to save the world from repeating the crimes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; from opening up the undeveloped parts of the world by violence and wrong; from nursing a sense of property that would be too strong, in case of conflict, for the sense of justice. In this sense he was well described in Carlyle's famous phrase,<sup>36</sup> 'an inspired bagman with a calico millenium'. For these words might be taken to mean that he was a traveller who had seen men and cities, with a mind lighted by genius, teaching a faith and doctrine that could deliver calico itself from the crimes that had stained the pirate seas.

Some who agree with Cobden's aim would argue that his plan for bringing the world to Free Trade was not the best plan. Some, again, would hold that it was dangerous to expect other peoples to draw from Britain's success under Free Trade the conclusions

## RICHARD COBDEN

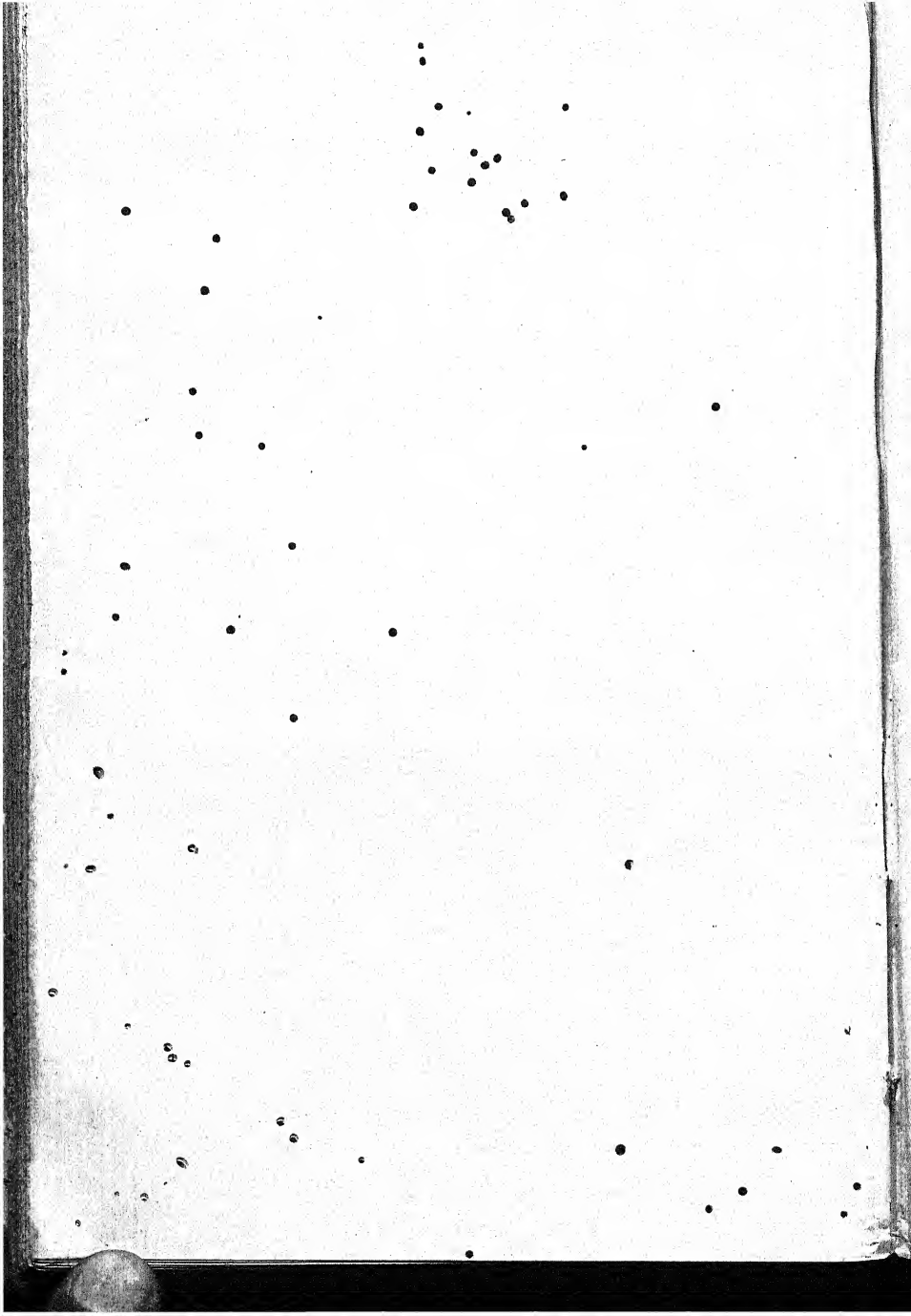
drawn by Cobden's converts among the British manufacturers and cotton spinners. Free Trade, again, occupied in Cobden's analysis an importance that most people to-day would think excessive. Too much was expected of it. Few people would hold that Universal Free Trade gives the answer to all the economic problems of a world that has become a single economic unit.

All these considerations could be urged in criticism of Cobden's statesmanship and foresight. But they do not touch his position as an intellectual and moral power in Europe in the nineteenth century. He stands out as a man acting consistently on a large view of politics. He brought his own nation to accept his conclusions, and he almost brought the world to accept them. These conclusions, though most persons would consider them a less complete answer than he supposed to the 'international' problem set by the Industrial Revolution, were based on a fundamental truth. The world was moving towards a new unity, with opportunities and dangers greater than it has ever known in its history. For the Industrial Revolution had created an elaborate world order, based on a system of exchange which was gradually drawing all peoples into a single plan of life. Cobden saw that every civilized people had a new duty to its neighbours under this system, and that this duty was specially binding on the people now enjoying the kind of ascendancy that had belonged at one time to Venice and Genoa, at another to the Portuguese and the Dutch. He asked of his nation that it should look beyond its own immediate desire and use this power in a spirit of generosity and

J. L. HAMMOND

forbearance. We need not turn back to distant centuries or search the civilizations of the past, recalling Isocrates and Cicero, Epaminondas and Scipio Africanus,<sup>37</sup> to determine whether a man who brings this wider wisdom into the violent atmosphere of politics deserves to live in history. All observers are agreed in tracing the confusion of the world to-day to the want of this guiding sense, in the hour when victory<sup>38</sup> had put the fortunes of Europe in the hands of a dozen politicians, trembling before popular passions, so lately their servants and now their masters. If mankind could summon the dead to its rescue, the two Englishmen to whom it would first turn in its distress are the men who, learning from different prophets, tried to teach their age this larger sympathy.

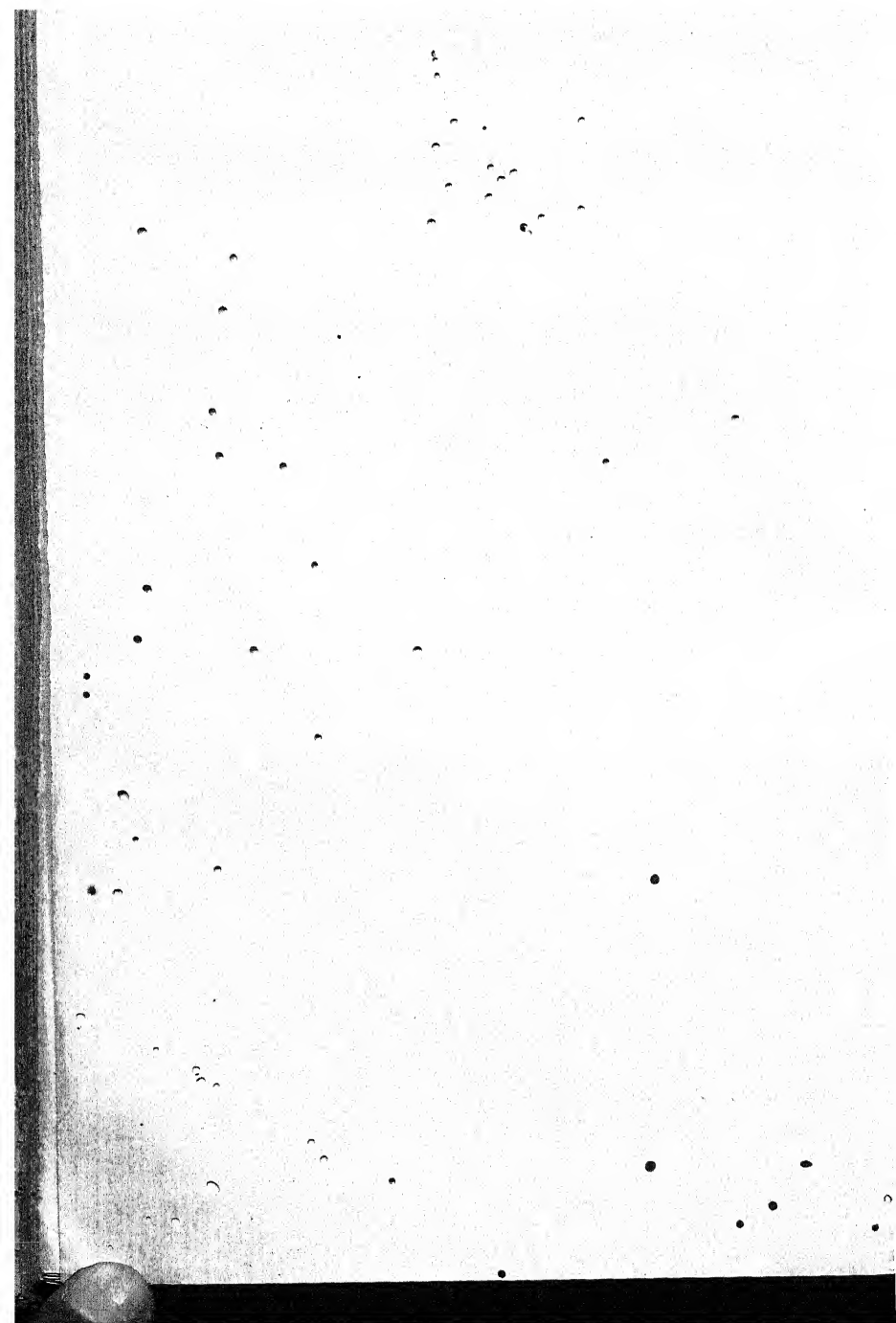
J. L. HAMMOND





LIBRARY OF  
EWING CHRISTIAN COLLEGE  
ATLANTA

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



## VI. ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON:

(1850-1894)

PEN in hand, I pause to think how I can render in words a faint impression of the most inspiring, the most fascinating human being that I have known.

### I

It is nearly a quarter of a century since I first saw Stevenson. In the autumn of 1870, in company with a former school fellow, I was in the Hebrides. We had been wandering in the Long Island, as they name the outer archipelago, and our steamer, returning, called at Skye. At the pier of Portree, I think, a company came on board, 'people of importance in their day,' Edinburgh acquaintances, I suppose, who had accidentally met in Skye on various errands. At all events, they invaded our modest vessel with a loud sound of talk. Professor Blackie<sup>2</sup> was among them, a famous figure that calls for no description; and a voluble, shaggy man, clad in homespun, with spectacles forward upon nose, who, it was whispered to us, was Mr. Sam Bough, the Scottish Academician, a water-colour painter of some repute, who was to die in 1878. There were also several engineers of prominence. At the tail of this chatty, jesting little crowd of invaders came a youth of about my own age, whose appearance, for some mysterious reason, instantly attracted me. He

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

was tall, preternaturally lean, with longish hair, and as restless and questing as a spaniel. The party from Portree fairly took possession of us; at meals they crowded around the captain, and we common tourists sat silent, below the salt. The stories of Blackie and Sam Bough were resonant. Meanwhile, I knew not why, I watched the plain, pale lad who took the lowest place in this privileged company.

The summer of 1870 remains in the memory of western Scotland as one of incomparable splendour. Our voyage, especially as evening drew on, was like an emperor's progress. We stayed on deck till the latest moment possible, and I occasionally watched the lean youth, busy and serviceable with some of the little tricks with which we were later on to grow familiar—the advance with hand on hip, the sidewise bending of the head to listen. Meanwhile darkness overtook us, a wonderful halo of moonlight swam up over Glenelg, the indigo of the peaks of the Cuchullins faded into the general blue night. I went below, but was presently aware of some change of course, and then of an unexpected stoppage. I tore on deck, and found that we had left our track among the islands, and had steamed up a narrow and unvisited fiord of the mainland—I think Loch Nevis. The sight was curious and bewildering. We lay in a gorge of blackness, with only a strip of the blue moonlit sky overhead; in the dark a few lanterns jumped about the shore, carried by agitated but unseen and soundless persons. As I leaned over the bulwarks, Stevenson was at my side, and he explained to me that we had come up this loch to take away to Glasgow a large party of emigrants

## EDMUND GOSSE

driven from their homes in the interests of a deer-forest. As he spoke, a black mass became visible entering the vessel. Then, as we slipped off shore, the fact of their hopeless exile came home to these poor fugitives, and suddenly, through the absolute silence, there arose from them a wild keening<sup>3</sup> and wailing, reverberated by the cliffs of the loch, and at that strange place and hour infinitely poignant. When I came back on deck next morning, my unnamed friend was gone. He had put off with the engineers to visit some remote lighthouse of the Hebrides.

This early glimpse of Stevenson is a delightful memory to me. When we met next, not only did I instantly recall him, but, what was stranger, he remembered me. This voyage in the *Clansman* was often mentioned between us, and it has received for me a sort of consecration from the fact that in the very last letter that Louis wrote, finished on the day of his death, he made a reference to it.

### 2

In the very touching *Recollections* which our friend Mr. Andrew Lang<sup>4</sup> has published, he says: 'I shall not deny that my first impression (of Stevenson) was not wholly favourable.' I remember, too, that John Addington Symonds<sup>5</sup> was not pleased at first. It only shows how different are our moods. I must confess that in my case the invading army simply walked up and took the fort by storm. It was in 1877, or late in 1876, that I was presented to Stevenson, at the old Savile Club, by Mr. Sidney Colvin,<sup>6</sup> who thereupon left

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

us to our devices. We went downstairs and lunched together, and then we adjourned to the smoking-room. As twilight came on I tore myself away, but Stevenson walked with me across Hyde Park, and nearly to my house. He had an engagement, and so had I, but I walked a mile or two back with him. The fountains of talk had been unsealed, and they drowned the conventions. I came home dazzled with my new friend, saying, as Constance does of Arthur,<sup>7</sup> 'Was ever such a gracious creature born?' That impression of ineffable mental charm was formed at the first moment of acquaintance, and it never lessened or became modified. Stevenson's rapidity in the sympathetic interchange of ideas was, doubtless, the source of it. He has been described as an 'egotist', but I challenge the description. If ever there was an altruist,<sup>8</sup> it was Louis Stevenson; he seemed to feign an interest in himself merely to stimulate you to be liberal in your confidences.

Those who have written about him from later impressions than those of which I speak seem to me to give insufficient prominence to the gaiety of Stevenson. It was his cardinal quality in those early days. A childlike mirth leaped and danced in him; he seemed to skip upon the hills of fire. He was simply bubbling with quips and jests; his inherent earnestness or passion about abstract things was incessantly relieved by jocosity; and when he had built one of his intellectual castles in the sand, a wave of humour was certain to sweep it and destroy it. I cannot, for the life of me, recall any of his jokes; and written down in cold blood, they might not be funny if I did. They

## EDMUND GOSSE

were not wit so much as humanity, the many-sided outlook upon life. I am anxious that his laughter-loving mood should not be forgotten, because later on it was partly, but I think never wholly, quenched by ill-health, responsibility, and the advance of years. He was often, in the old days, excessively and delightfully silly—silly with the silliness of an inspired schoolboy; and I am afraid that our laughter sometimes sounded ill in the ears of age.

A pathos was given to his gaiety by the fragility of his health. He was never well, all the years I knew him; and we looked upon his life as hanging by the frailest tenure. As he never complained or maundered, this, no doubt—though we were not aware of it—added to the charm of his presence. He was so bright and keen and witty, and any week he might die. No one, certainly, conceived it possible that he could reach his forty-fifth year. In 1879 his health visibly began to run lower, and he used to bury himself in lonely Scotch and French places, 'tinkering himself with solitude,' as he used to say.

My experience of Stevenson during these first years was confined to London, upon which he would make sudden piratical descents, staying a few days or weeks, and melting into air again. He was much at my house; and it must be told that my wife and I, as young married people, had possessed ourselves of a house too large for our slender means immediately to furnish. The one person who thoroughly approved of our great, bare, absurd drawing-room was Louis, who very earnestly dealt with us on the immorality of chairs and tables, and desired us to sit always, as he delighted



## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

to sit, upon hassocks on the floor. Nevertheless, as arm-chairs and settees struggled into existence, he handsomely consented to use them, although never in the usual way, but with his legs thrown sideways over the arms of them, or the head of the sofa treated as a perch. In particular, a certain shelf, with cupboards below, attached to a bookcase, is worn with the person of Stevenson, who would spend half an evening, while passionately discussing some great question of morality or literature, leaping sideways in a seated posture to the length of this shelf, and then back again. He was eminently peripatetic, too, and never better company than walking in the street, this exercise seeming to inflame his fancy. But his most habitual dwelling place in the London of those days was the Savile Club, then lodged in an inconvenient but very friendly house in Savile Row. Louis pervaded the club; he was its most affable and chatty member; and he lifted it, by the ingenuity of his incessant dialectic, to the level of a sort of humorous Academe or Mouseion.<sup>9</sup>

At this time he must not be thought of as a successful author. A very few of us were convinced of his genius; but with the exception of Mr. Leslie Stephen,<sup>10</sup> nobody of editorial status was sure of it. I remember the publication of *An Inland Voyage* in 1878, and the inability of the critics and the public to see anything unusual in it.

Stevenson was not without a good deal of innocent oddity in his dress. When I try to conjure up his figure, I can see only a slight, lean lad, in a suit of blue sea-cloth, a black shirt, and a wisp of yellow carpet that did duty for a necktie. This was long his attire,

## EDMUND GOSSE

persevered in to the anguish of his more conventional acquaintances. I have a ludicrous memory of going, in 1878, to buy him a new hat, in company with Mr. Lang, the thing then upon his head having lost the semblance of a human article of dress. Aided by a very civil shopman, we suggested several hats and caps. and Louis at first seemed interested ;, but having presently hit upon one which appeared to us pleasing and decorous, we turned for a moment to inquire the price. We turned back, and found that Louis had fled, the idea of parting with the shapeless object having proved too painful to be entertained. By the way, Mr. Lang will pardon me if I tell, in exacter detail, a story of his. It was immediately after the adventure with the hat that, not having quite enough money to take him from London to Edinburgh, third class, he proposed to the railway clerk to throw in a copy of Mr. Swinburne's *Queen-Mother and Rosamond*.<sup>11</sup> The offer was refused with scorn, although the book was of the first edition, and even then worth more than the cost of a whole ticket.

Stevenson's pity was a very marked quality, and it extended to beggars, which is, I think, to go too far. His optimism, however, suffered a rude shock in South Audley Street one summer afternoon. We met a stalwart beggar, whom I refused to aid. Louis, however, wavered, and finally handed him sixpence. The man pocketed the coin, forebore to thank his benefactor, but, fixing his eye on me, said in a loud voice, ' And what is the other little gentleman going to give me ? ' ' In future,' said Louis, as we strode coldly on, ' I shall be " the other little gentleman " '.

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

In those early days, he suffered many indignities on account of his extreme youthfulness of appearance and absence of self-assertion. He was at Inverness—being five or six and twenty at the time—and had taken a room in a hotel. Coming back about dinner-time, he asked the hour of the *table d'hôte*, whereupon the landlady said, in a motherly way: 'Oh, I knew you wouldn't like to sit in there among the grown-up people, so I've had a place put for you in the bar.' There was a frolic at the Royal Hotel, Bathgate, in the summer of 1879. Louis was lunching alone, and the maid, considering him a negligible quantity, came and leaned out of the window. This outrage on the proprieties was so stinging that Louis at length made free to ask her, with irony, what she was doing there. 'I'm looking for my lad,' she replied. 'Is that he?' asked Stevenson, with keener sarcasm, 'Weel, I've been lookin' for him a' my life, and I've never seen him yet,' was the response. Louis was disarmed at once, and wrote her on the spot some beautiful verses in the vernacular. 'They're no bad for a beginner,' she was kind enough to say when she had read them.

The year 1879 was a dark one in the life of Louis. He had formed a conviction that it was his duty to go out to the extreme west of the United States, while his family and the inner circle of his friends were equally certain that it was neither needful nor expedient that he should make this journey. As it turned out, they were wrong, and he was right; but in the circumstances their opinion seemed the only correct one. His health was particularly bad, and he was ordered, not west, but south. The expedition, which he has partly

## EDMUND GOSSE

described in *The Amateur Emigrant* and *Across the Plains*,<sup>12</sup> was taken, therefore, in violent opposition to all those whom he left in England and Scotland ; and this accounts for the mode in which it was taken. He did not choose to ask for money to be spent in going to California, and it was hoped that the withdrawal of supplies would make the voyage impossible. But Louis, bringing to the front a streak of iron obstinacy which lay hidden somewhere in his gentle nature, scraped together enough to secure him a steerage passage across the Atlantic.

The day before he started he spent with my wife and me—a day of stormy agitation, an April day of rain-clouds and sunshine ; for it was not in Louis to remain long in any mood. I seem to see him now, pacing the room, a cigarette spinning in his wasted fingers. To the last we were trying to dissuade him from what seemed to us the maddest of enterprises. He was so ill that I did not like to leave him, and at night—it was mid-summer weather—we walked down into town together. We were by this time, I suppose, in a pretty hysterical state of mind, and as we went through Berkeley Square, in mournful discussion of the future, Louis suddenly proposed that we should visit the so-called ' Haunted House ', which then occupied the newspapers. The square was quiet in the decency of a Sunday evening. We found the house, and one of us boldly knocked at the door. There was no answer and no sound, and we jeered upon the door-step ; but suddenly we were both aware of a pale face—a phantasm in the dusk—gazing down upon us from a surprising height. It was the caretaker, I suppose, mounted

!

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

upon a flight of steps, but terror gripped us at the heart, and we fled with footsteps as precipitate as those of schoolboys caught in an orchard. I think that ghostly face in Berkeley Square must have been Louis's latest European impression for many months.

3

All the world now knows, through the two books which I have named, what immediately happened. Presently letters began to arrive, and in one from Monterey, written early in October 1879, he told me of what was probably the nearest approach of death that ever came until the end, fifteen years later. I do not think it is generally known, even in the inner circle of his friends, that in September of that year he was violently ill, alone, at an Angora-goat ranch in the Santa Lucia Mountains. 'I scarcely slept or ate or thought for four days,' he said. 'Two nights I lay out under a tree, in a sort of stupor, doing nothing but fetch water for myself and horse, light a fire and make coffee, and all night awake hearing the goat-bells ringing and the tree-toads singing, when each new noise was enough to set me mad.' Then an old frontiersman, a mighty hunter of bears, came round, and tenderly nursed him through his attack. 'By all rule this should have been my death, but after a while my spirit got up again in a divine frenzy, and has since kicked and spurred my vile body forward with great emphasis and success.'

Late in the winter of 1879, with renewed happiness and calm of life, and also under the spur of a need of

## EDMUND GOSSE

money, he wrote with much assiduity. Among other things, he composed at Monterey the earliest of his novels, a book called *A Vendetta in the West*, the manuscript of which seems to have disappeared. Perhaps we need not regret it; for, so he declared to me, 'It was about as bad as Ouida,<sup>13</sup> but not quite, for it was not so eloquent.' He had made a great mystery of his whereabouts; indeed for several months no one was to know what had become of him, and his letters were to be considered secret. At length, in writing from Monterey, on 15 November 1879, he removed the embargo: 'That I am in California may now be published to the brethren.' In the summer of the next year, after a winter of very serious ill health, during which more than once he seemed on the brink of a galloping consumption, he returned to England. He had married in California a charming lady whom we all soon learned to regard as the most appropriate and helpful companion that Louis could possibly have secured. On 8 October 1880—a memorable day—he made his first appearance in London since his American exile. A postcard from Edinburgh had summoned me to 'appoint with an appointment' certain particular friends, 'and let us once again', Louis wrote, 'lunch together in the Savile Halls.' Mr. Lang and Mr. Walter Pollock, and, I think, Mr. Henley<sup>14</sup> graced the occasion, and the club cellar produced a bottle of Chambertin of quite uncommon merit. Louis, I may explain, had a peculiar passion for Burgundy, which he esteemed the wine of highest possibilities in the whole Bacchic order; and I have often known him descant on a Pommard or

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Montrachet in terms so exquisite that the listeners could scarcely taste the wine itself.

Davos-Platz was now prescribed for the rickety lungs; and late in that year Louis and his wife took up their abode there, at the Hotel Buol, he carrying with him a note from me recommending him to the care of John Addington Symonds. Not at first, but presently and on the whole, these two men, so singular in their generation, so unique and so unlike, 'hit it off,' as people say, and were an intellectual solace to each other; but their real friendship did not begin till a year later. I remember Stevenson saying to me next spring that to be much with Symonds was to 'adventure in a thornwood'. It was at Davos, this winter of 1880, that Stevenson took up the study of Hazlitt,<sup>15</sup> having found a publisher who was willing to bring out a critical and biographical memoir. This scheme occupied a great part of Louis's attention, but was eventually dropped; for the further he progressed in the investigation of Hazlitt's character the less he liked it, and the squalid *Liber Amoris*<sup>16</sup> gave the *coup de grâce*. He did not know what he would be at. His vocation was not yet apparent to him. He talked of writing on craniology and the botany of the Alps. The unwritten books of Stevenson will one day attract the scholiast, who will endeavour, perhaps, to reconstruct them from the references to them in his correspondence. It may, therefore, be permissible to record here that he was long proposing to write a life of the Duke of Wellington, for which he made some considerable collections. This was even advertised as 'in preparation', on several occasions, from 1885 until



## EDMUND GOSSE

1887, but was ultimately abandoned. I remember his telling me that he intended to give emphasis to the 'humour' of Wellington.

In June 1881 we saw him again; but he passed very rapidly through London to a cottage at Pitlochry in Perthshire. He had lost his hold on town. 'London,' he wrote me, 'now chiefly means to me Colvin and Henley, Leslie Stephen and you.' He was now coursing a fresh literary hare, and set Mr. Austin Dobson, Mr. Saintsbury,<sup>17</sup> and me busily hunting out facts about Jean Cavalier,<sup>18</sup> the romantic eighteenth-century adventurer, whose life he fancied that he would write. His thoughts had recurred, in fact, to Scottish history; and he suddenly determined to do what seemed rather a mad thing—namely, to stand for the Edinburgh Professorship of history, then just vacant. We were all whipped up for testimonials, and a little pamphlet exists, in a pearl-grey cover—the despair of bibliophiles—in which he and a strange assortment of his friends set forth his claims. These required nimble treatment, since, to put it plainly, it was impossible to say that he had any. His appeal was treated by the advocates, who were the electing body, with scant consideration, and some worthy gentleman was elected. The round Louis was well out of such a square hole as a chair in a university.

But something better was at hand. It was now, and in the peace of the Highlands, that Louis set out to become a popular writer. The fine art of 'booming' had not then been introduced, nor the race of those who week by week discover coveys of fresh geniuses. Although Stevenson, in a sporadic way, had written

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

much that was delightful, and that will last, he was yet—now at the close of his thirty-first year—by no means successful. The income he made by his pen was still ridiculously small; and Mr. John Morley,<sup>19</sup> amazing as it sounds to-day, had just refused to give him a book to write in the English Men of Letters series, on the ground of his obscurity as an author. All this was to be changed, and the book that was to do it was even now upon the stocks. In August the Stevensons moved to a house in Braemar—a place, as Louis said, ‘patronized by the royalty of the Sister Kingdoms—Victoria and the Cairngorms, sir, honouring that countryside by their conjunct presence.’ The house, as Louis was careful to instruct me, was entitled ‘The Cottage, late the late Miss McGregor’s, Castleton of Braemar’; and thus I obediently addressed my letters until Louis remarked that ‘the reference to a deceased Highland lady, tending as it does to foster unavailing sorrow, may be with advantage omitted from the address.’

To the Cottage, therefore, heedless of the names of the late Miss McGregor, I proceeded in the most violent storm of hail and rain that even Aberdeenshire can produce in August, and found Louis as frail as a ghost, indeed, but better than I expected. He had adopted a trick of stretching his thin limbs over the back of a wicker sofa, which gave him an extraordinary resemblance to that quaint insect, the praying mantis; but it was a mercy to find him out of bed at all. Among the many attractions of the Cottage, the presence of Mr. Thomas Stevenson—Louis’s father—must not be omitted. He was then a singularly charming and

EDMUND GOSSE

vigorous personality, indignantly hovering at the borders of old age ('Sixty-three, sir, this year; and, deuce take it! am I to be called "an old gentleman" by a cab-driver in the streets of Aberdeen?') and, to my gratitude and delight, my companion in long morning walks. The detestable weather presently brought all the other members of the household to their beds, and Louis in particular became a wreck. However, it was a wreck that floated every day at nightfall; for at the worst he was able to come downstairs to dinner and spend the evening with us.

We passed the days with regularity. After breakfast I went to Louis's bedroom, where he sat up in a bed, with dark, flashing eyes and ruffled hair, and we played chess on the coverlet. Not a word passed, for he was strictly forbidden to speak in the early part of the day. As soon as he felt tired—often in the middle of a game—he would rap with peremptory knuckles on the board as a signal to stop, and then Mrs. Stevenson or I would arrange his writing materials on the bed. Then I would see no more of him till dinner-time, when he would appear, smiling and voluble, the horrid bar of speechlessness having been let down. Then every night, after dinner, he would read us what he had written during the day. I find in a note to my wife dated 3 September 1881: 'Louis has been writing, all the time I have been here, a novel of pirates and hidden treasure, in the highest degree exciting. He reads it to us every night, chapter by chapter.' This, of course, was *Treasure Island*,<sup>20</sup> about the composition of which, long afterwards, in Samoa, he wrote an account in some parts of which I think that his memory played him false. Is

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

look back to no keener intellectual pleasure than those cold nights at Braemar, with the sleet howling outside, and Louis reading his budding romance by the lamp-light, emphasizing the purpler passages with lifted voice and gesticulating finger.

### 4

Hardly had I left the Cottage than the harsh and damp climate of Aberdeenshire was felt to be rapidly destroying Louis, and he and his wife fled to Davos. Before the end of October they were ensconced there in a fairly comfortable chalet. Here Louis and his step-son amused themselves by setting up a hand-press, which Mr. Osbourne<sup>21</sup> worked, and for which Louis provided the literary material. Four or five laborious little publications were put forth, some of them illustrated by the daring hand of Stevenson himself. He complained to me that Mr. Osbourne was a very ungenerous publisher—'one penny a cut, and one half-penny a set of verses! What do you say to that for Grub Street?'<sup>22</sup> These little diversions were brought to a close by the printer-publisher breaking, at one fell swoop, the press and his own finger. The little Davos press issues now fetch extravagant prices, which would have filled author and printer with amazement. About this time Louis and I had a good deal of correspondence about a work which he had proposed that we should undertake in collaboration—a re-telling, in choice literary form, of the most picturesque murder cases of the last hundred years. We were to visit the scenes of these crimes, and turn over the evidence. The great thing, Louis said, was not to begin to write until we

## EDMUND GOSSE

were thoroughly alarmed. 'These things must be done my boy, under the very shudder of the goose-flesh.' We were to begin with the 'Story of the Red Bard,' which indeed is a tale pre-eminently worthy to be re-told by Stevenson. But the scheme never came off, and is another of the dead leaves in his Vallombrosa.<sup>23</sup>

We saw him in London again, for a few days, in October 1882; but this was a melancholy period. For eight months at the close of that year and the beginning of 1883 he was capable of no mental exertion. He was in the depths of languor, and in nightly apprehension of a fresh attack. He slept excessively, and gave humorous accounts of the drowsiness that hung upon him, addressing his notes 'from the Arms of Porpus' (Morpheus) and 'at the Sign of the Poppy'. No climate seemed to relieve him, and so, in the autumn of 1882, a bold experiment was tried. As the snows of Davos were of no avail, the hot, damp airs of Hyères should be essayed. I am inclined to dwell in some fulness on the year he spent at Hyères, because, curiously enough, it was not so much as mentioned, to my knowledge, by any of the writers of obituary notices at Stevenson's death. It takes, nevertheless, a prominent place in his life's history, for his removal thither marked a sudden and brilliant, though only temporary, revival in his health and spirits. Some of his best work, too, was written at Hyères, and one might say that fame first found him in his warm corner of southern France.

The house at Hyères was called 'La Solitude'. It stood in a paradise of roses and aloes, fig-marigolds, and olives. It had delectable and even, so Louis

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

declared, 'sub-celestial' views over a plain bounded by 'certain mountains as graceful as Apollo, as severe as Zeus'; and at first the hot mistral,<sup>24</sup> which blew and burned where it blew, seemed the only drawback. Not a few of the best poems in the *Underwoods*<sup>25</sup> reflect the ecstasy of convalescence under the skies and perfumes of 'La Solitude'. By the summer Louis could report 'good health of a radiant order'. It was while he was at Hyères that Stevenson first directly addressed an American audience, and I may record that, in September 1883, he told me to 'beg Gilder<sup>26</sup> your prettiest for a gentleman in pecuniary sloughs'. Mr. Gilder was quite alive to the importance of securing such a contributor, although when the Amateur Emigrant had entered the office of the *Century Magazine* in 1879 he had been very civilly but coldly shown the door. (I must be allowed to tease my good friends in Union Square by recording that fact!) Mr. Gilder asked for fiction, but received instead *The Silverado Squatters*, which duly appeared in the magazine.

It was also arranged that Stevenson should make an ascent of the Rhone for *The Century*, and Mr. Joseph Pennell<sup>27</sup> was to accompany him to make sketches for the magazine. But Stevenson's health failed again; the sudden death of a very dear old friend was a painful shock to him, and the winter of that year was not propitious. Abruptly, however, in January 1884, another crisis came. He went to Nice, where he was thought to be dying. He saw no letters; all his business was kindly taken charge of by Mr. Henley; and again for a long time, he passed beneath the penumbra of steady languor and infirmity. When it

## EDMUND GOSSE

is known how constantly he suffered, how brief and flickering were the intervals of comparative health, it cannot but add to the impression of his radiant fortitude through all these trials, and of his persistent employment of all lucid moments. It was pitiful, and yet at the same time very inspiring, to see a creature, so feeble and so ill equipped for the struggle bear himself so smilingly and so manfully through all his afflictions. There can be no doubt, however, that this latest breakdown vitally affected his spirits. He was never, after this, quite the gay child of genius that he had previously been. Something of a graver cast became natural to his thoughts; he had seen Death in the cave.<sup>28</sup> And now for the first time he traced a new note in his writings—the note of ‘Pulvis et Umbra’.<sup>29</sup>

After 1883 my personal memories of Stevenson become very casual. In November 1884, he was settled at Bournemouth, in a villa called ‘Bonaltie Towers’, and there he stayed until, in March 1885, he took a house of his own, which, in pious memory of his grandfather,<sup>30</sup> he named ‘Skerryvore’. In the preceding winter, when I was going to America to lecture, he was particularly anxious that I should lay at the feet of Mr. Frank R. Stockton<sup>31</sup> his homage, couched in the following lines:

My Stockton if I failed to like,  
It were a sheer depravity;  
For I went down with the ‘Thomas Hyke’,  
And up with the ‘Negative Gravity’.<sup>32</sup>

He adored these tales of Mr. Stockton’s, a taste which must be shared by all good men. To my constant



## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

sorrow, I was never able to go to Bournemouth during the years he lived there. It has been described to me, by those who are more fortunate, as a pleasure that was apt to tantalize and evade the visitor, so constantly was the invalid unable, at the last, to see the friend who had travelled a hundred miles to speak with him. It was, therefore, during his visits to London, infrequent as these were, that we saw him at his best, for these were made at moments of unusual recovery. He generally lodged at what he called the 'Monument', this being his title for Mr. Colvin's house, a wing of the vast structure of the British Museum. I recall an occasion on which Louis dined with us (March 1886), because of the startling interest in the art of strategy which he had developed—an interest which delayed the meal with arrangements of serried bottles counter-scarped and lines of cruets drawn up on horseback ready to charge. So infectious was his enthusiasm that we forgot our hunger, and hung over the embattled tablecloth, easily persuaded to agree with him that neither poetry nor the plastic arts could compete for a moment with 'the finished conduct, sir, of a large body of men in face of the enemy'.

It was a little later that he took up the practice of modelling clay figures as he sat up in bed. Some of these compositions—which needed, perhaps, his eloquent commentary to convey their full effect to the spectator—were not without a measure of skill of design. I recollect his saying with extreme gravity, 'I am in sculpture what Mr. Watts<sup>33</sup> is in painting. We were both of us preoccupied with moral and abstract ideas.' I wonder whether anyone has

## EDMUND GOSSE

preserved specimens of these allegorical groups of clay.

The last time I had the happiness of seeing Stevenson was on Sunday, 21 August 1887. He had been brought up from Bournemouth the day before in a wretched condition of health, and was lodged in a private hotel in Finsbury Circus, in the City, ready to be easily moved to a steamer in the Thames on the morrow. I was warned, in a note, of his passage through town, and of the uncertainty whether he could be seen. On the chance, I went over early on the 21st, and, very happily for me, he had had a fair night, and could see me for an hour or two. No one else but Mrs. Stevenson was with him. His position was one which might have daunted any man's spirit, doomed to exile, in miserable health, starting vaguely across the Atlantic, with all his domestic interests rooted up, and with no notion where, or if at all, they should be replanted. If ever a man of imagination could be excused for repining, it was now.

But Louis showed no white feather. He was radiantly humorous and romantic. It was church time, and there was some talk of my witnessing his will, which I could not do, because there could be found no other reputable witness, the whole crew of the hotel being at church. This set Louis off on a splendid dream of romance. 'This', he said, 'is the way in which our valuable city hotels—packed, doubtless, with rich objects of jewellery—are deserted on a Sunday morning. Some bold piratical fellow, defying the spirit of Sabbatarianism, might make a handsome revenue by sacking the derelict hotels between the

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

hours of ten and twelve. One hotel a week would suffice to enable such a man to retire into private life within the space of a year. A mask might, perhaps, be worn for the mere fancy of the thing, and to terrify kitchen-maids, but no real disguise would be needful to an enterprise that would require nothing but a brave heart and careful study of the City Postal Directory.' He spoke of the matter with so much fire and gallantry that I blushed for the youth of England and its lack of manly enterprise. No one ever could describe preposterous conduct with such a convincing air as Louis could. Common sense was positively humble in his presence.

The volume of his poems called *Underwoods* had just appeared and he inscribed a copy of it to me in the words 'at Todgers; as ever was, chez Todgers, Pecksniff Street'.<sup>34</sup> The only new book he seemed to wish to carry away with him was Mr. Hardy's beautiful romance, *The Woodlanders*,<sup>35</sup> which we had to scour London that Sunday afternoon to get hold of. In the evening Mr. Colvin and I each returned to 'Todgers' with the three volumes borrowed or stolen somewhere and wrapped up for the voyage next day. And so the following morning in an extraordinary vessel called the *Ludgate Hill*—as though in compliment to Mr. Stockton's genius—and carrying, besides the Stevensons, a cargo of stallions and monkeys, Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson and Mr. Lloyd Osbourne steamed down the Thames in search of health across the Atlantic and Pacific. The horses, Louis declared, protruded their noses in an unmannerly way between the passengers at dinner, and the poor little grey monkeys, giving up life for a bad job

## EDMUND GOSSE

on board that strange, heaving cage, died by dozens, and were flung contemptuously out into the ocean. The strangest voyage, however, some time comes to an end, and Louis landed in America. He was never to cross the Atlantic again; and for those who loved him in Europe he had already journeyed more than half-way to another world.

### 5

It is impossible to deal, however, lightly with the personal qualities of Robert Louis Stevenson without dwelling on the extreme beauty of his character. In looking back over the twenty years in which I knew him, I feel that, since he was eminently human, I ought to recall his faults, but I protest that I can remember none. Perhaps the nearest approach to a fault was a certain way of discretion, always founded on a wish to make people understand each other, but not exactly according to wisdom. I recollect that he once embroiled me for a moment with John Addington Symonds in a manner altogether bloodthirsty and ridiculous, so that we both fell upon him and rended him. This little weakness is really the blackest crime I can lay to his charge. And on the other side, what courage, what love, what an indomitable spirit, what a melting pity! He had none of the sordid errors of the little man who writes—no sick ambition, no envy of others, no exaggeration of the value of this ephemeral trick of scribbling. He was eager to help his fellows, ready to take a second place, with great difficulty offended, by the least show of repentance perfectly appeased.

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Quite early in his career he adjusted himself to the inevitable sense of physical failure. He threw away from him all the useless impediments: he sat loosely in the saddle of life. Many men who get such a warning as he got take up something to lean against; according to their education or temperament, they support their maimed existence on religion, or on cynical indifference, or on some mania of the collector or the dilettante. Stevenson did none of these things. He determined to make the sanest and most genial use of so much of life as was left him. As anyone who reads his books can see, he had a deep strain of natural religion; but he kept it to himself; he made no hysterical or ostentatious use of it.

Looking back at the past, one recalls a trait that had its significance, though one missed its meaning then. He was careful, as I have hardly known any other man to be, not to allow himself to be burdened by the weight of material things. It was quite a jest with us that he never acquired any possessions. In the midst of those who produced books, pictures, prints, bric-à-brac, none of these things ever stuck to Stevenson. There are some deep-sea creatures, the early part of whose life is spent dancing through the waters; at length some sucker or tentacle touches a rock, adheres, pulls down more tentacles, until the creature is caught there, stationary for the remainder of its existence. So it happens to men, and Stevenson's friends one after another caught the ground with a house, a fixed employment, a 'stake in life'; he alone kept dancing in the free element, unattached. I remember his saying to me that if ever he had a

## EDMUND GOSSE

garden he should like it to be empty, just a space to walk and talk in, with no flowers to need a gardener nor fine lawns that had to be mown. Just a fragment of a bare world to move in, that was all Stevenson asked for. And we who gathered possessions around us—a little library of rare books, a little gallery of drawings or bronzes—he mocked us with his goblin laughter, it was only so much more luggage to carry on the march, he said, so much more to strain the arms and bend the back.

Stevenson thought, as we all must think, that literature is a delightful profession, a primrose path. I remember his once saying so to me, and when he turned, with the brimming look in his lustrous eyes and the tremulous smile on his lips, and added, 'But it is not all primroses. Some of it is brambly, and most of it uphill.' He knew—no one better—how the hill catches the breath and how the brambles tear the face and hands; but he pushed strenuously, serenely on, searching for new paths, struggling to get up into the light and air.

One reason why it was difficult to be certain that Stevenson had reached his utmost in any direction was what I will call, for want of a better phrase, the energetic modesty of his nature. He was never satisfied with himself, yet never cast down. There are two dangers that beset the artist, the one is being pleased with what he has done, and the other being dejected with it. Stevenson, more than any other man whom I have known, steered the middle course. He never conceived that he had achieved a great success, but he never lost hope that by taking pains he might yet do so.

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Twelve years ago when he was beginning to write that curious and fascinating book, *Prince Otto*,<sup>36</sup> he wrote to me describing the mood in which one should go about one's work—golden words, which I have never forgotten. 'One should strain,' he said, 'and then play, strain again, and play again. The strain is for us, it educates; the play is for the reader, and pleases. In moments of effort one learns to do the easy things that people like.'

He learned that which he desired, and he gained more than he hoped for. He became the most exquisite English writer of his generation; yet those who lived close to him are apt to think less of this than of the fact that he was the most unselfish and the most lovable of human beings.

EDMUND GOSSE



## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION:

#### THE ART OF THE BIOGRAPHER

<sup>1</sup> A. C. Benson: (1862-1925) schoolmaster, poet, essayist, himself wrote many biographies, including those of Rossetti, Fitzgerald and Pater in the well-known 'English Men of Letters' series.

<sup>2</sup> well-known poem by Rossetti: entitled 'The Portrait'. There are twelve stanzas in all, of which these are the first. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), painter as well as poet, belonged to the famous pre-Raphaelite group, pledged to oppose contemporary conventionalism in art. Among his works may be noticed *The Blessed Damozel*, *The White Ship* and *The King's Tragedy*.

<sup>3</sup> the painter has nothing to do with interpretation: a hyperbolic way of putting it; Benson's friend is perhaps thinking of the true artist's prevision of the whole picture that is to be. Every stroke of his brush carries the painter a step forward till the vision is achieved and expressed.

#### I. JOHN MILTON

<sup>1</sup> Augustine Birrell: (1850- ), President of the Board of Education 1905-7; Chief Secretary for Ireland 1907-16, and well-known author of literary studies and essays. The essay included here is taken from *Obiter Dicta* (1887). Other volumes of *Obiter Dicta* appeared in 1884 and 1924.

<sup>2</sup> who aspired himself to be a noble poem: 'I was confirmed in this opinion, that he would not be frustrate of

## NOTES

his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem (*Smectymnuus*, 1641).

<sup>3</sup> *the moral king of English literature*: the reference is to Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*, pt. ii., in a passage discussing the ideals of men of letters.

<sup>4</sup> *cockle hat and shoon*: traditional uniform of the pilgrim.

<sup>5</sup> *Henry Kirke White*: (1785-1806), son of a Nottingham tradesman. One or two of his hymns are still sung.

<sup>6</sup> *Dr. John Byrom*: (1692-1763), a teacher of shorthand. He also wrote hymns and other verse.

<sup>7</sup> *Roscoe*: William (1753-1831), minor historian and business man.

<sup>8</sup> *Romola*: George Eliot's novel, published in 1863, the scene of which is Florence. George Eliot was the pen-name of Mary Ann Cross née Evans (1819-1880), one of the most famous of English women novelists.

<sup>9</sup> *Or let my lamp*, etc.: quoted from *Il Penseroso* (85-7); The 'Bear', of course, is the constellation. The lines previously quoted are from *L'Allegro*. 'Pauline'—a scholar at St. Paul's.

<sup>10</sup> *Dr. Johnson's malicious remark*: see Johnson's *Life of Milton*—'He thought woman made only for obedience, and man only for rebellion' (§ 167).

<sup>11</sup> *Vale, vale, et aeternum vale*: 'Farewell, farewell, and for ever farewell'—more usually written in *aeternum*—an inscription frequently found on tombstones.

<sup>12</sup> *high midsummer pomps*: the phrase is taken from Matthew Arnold, *Thyrsis*, vii.

<sup>13</sup> 'Mermaid': the famous tavern in Bread Street (where Milton was born), off Cheapside, frequented by Shakespeare and many famous seventeenth century writers. See Keats's *Lines on the Mermaid Tavern*.

<sup>14</sup> *in widest commonalty spread*: see Wordsworth, *The Recluse*, I, i, 771; quoted in Preface to *The Excursion* (1814).

## MILTON

<sup>15</sup> *Hodge*: country bumpkin.

<sup>16</sup> *I, certainly, who have not*, etc.: from Milton's letter to Beneditto Bonmattèi, the Italian scholar, written from Florence in 1638.

<sup>17</sup> *the young Deodati*: friend and schoolfellow of Milton, to whom the latter addressed his *Epitaphium Damonis*.

<sup>18</sup> *immemorial elms*: Cf. Tennyson, 'The moan of doves in immemorial elms' (*Princess*, vii, 206).

<sup>19</sup> *'that woman country, wooed not wed'*: from Browning, *By the Fireside*, vi.

<sup>20</sup> *But let my due feet never fail*, etc.: quoted from *Il Penseroso*, 155ff.

<sup>21</sup> *'grim wolf'*, etc.: see *Lycidas*, 128ff:—

Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw  
Daily devours apace, and nothing said.

<sup>22</sup> *Dr. Newman*: Cardinal Newman (1801-1890). See *The Arians* (ed. 1908) p. 93 note.

<sup>23</sup> *Emerson*: 'Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind' (*Essays, First Series*, II 'Self-Reliance').

<sup>24</sup> *Sir Philip Sidney*: (1554-1586), soldier, statesman and poet, toured the continent as a young man.

<sup>25</sup> *Montaigne*, etc.: Montaigne (1533-92), the genial and sceptic French essayist; John Evelyn (1620-1706), the diarist; Thomas Gray (1716-1771), the poet of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*; Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), the romantic poet; Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832).

<sup>26</sup> *Barberini . . . Baroni*: Cardinal Barberini, nephew of Pope Urban VIII, a great patron of the arts. Milton addressed three Latin epigrams to Leonora Baroni: 'there can have been no Englishman then in Rome that

## NOTES

could appreciate it [Leonora's voice] more exquisitely than Milton—see Masson, *Life of Milton*, I, 803.

<sup>27</sup> Coleridge's dictum: writing of *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge remarks: 'The connexion of the sentences and the position of the words are exquisitely artificial; but the position is rather according to the logic of passion or universal logic, than to the logic of grammar. . . . Milton is not a picturesque, but a musical, poet; although he has this merit that the object chosen by him for any particular foreground always remains prominent to the end, enriched, but not incumbered, by the opulence of descriptive details furnished by an exhaustless imagination.' See *Literary Remains*, I, 169-78.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Johnson's sneers: the exact words (they are partly quoted by Mr. Birrell *infra*) are: 'Let not our veneration for Milton forbid us to look with some degree of merriment on great promises and small performance, on the man who hastens home, because his countrymen are contending for their liberty, and, when he reaches the scene of action, vapours away his patriotism in a private boarding-school' (*Life of Milton*, § 34).

<sup>29</sup> as another pedagogue has reminded us: the words are Dr. Johnson's—himself a schoolmaster, and one who had suffered from the contempt which in his days attached to the profession.

<sup>30</sup> *Strafford . . . Laud*: Strafford (1593-1641) first opposed and then befriended Charles I. He was impeached and executed by the Parliament; Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury, was also impeached by the Long Parliament and beheaded.

<sup>31</sup> *He scrupled not to eat*, etc.: see *Paradise Lost*, bk. ix, 997ff:—

Against his better knowledge, not deceived,  
But fondly overcome with female charm.

## MILTON

<sup>32</sup> 'tented field': the earliest example of this phrase given in the *O.E.D.* is from Longfellow, *Coplas de Manrique*, ix. But cf. *Othello*, I, iii, 85.

<sup>33</sup> *In the summer of 1643*: more probably in June 1642, according to modern research. 'Within six weeks he consented to her [his wife] going home to her parents on condition that she returned by Michaelmas. She did not do so, perhaps for reasons connected with the outbreak of the Civil War.' In 1645 was published the first pamphlet on divorce.

<sup>34</sup> *As one looks upon this picture*: a recollection of *Hamlet*, III, iv, 54.

<sup>35</sup> *Phillips*: When Milton returned from Italy he became tutor to Edward and John Phillips, his two nephews.

<sup>36</sup> *Barbican*: a street in London—close to Aldersgate.

<sup>37</sup> 'our English,' etc.: from the *Areopagitica* (ed. Hales, p. 12). The sentence is thus completed: '... will not easily find servile letters enow to spell such a dictatory presumption English.'

<sup>38</sup> *Mr. Pattison*: Mark Pattison (1813-1884) wrote a life of Milton for the 'English Men of Letters' Series.

<sup>39</sup> *the way he revenged himself*: Milton allowed the very bad work of the artist, William Marshall, to be printed, but induced him to add, in Greek—which Marshall did not know—a quotation which vilified his own work! Masson (*Life*, III, 459) thus translates the verse:—

'That an unskilful hand had carved this print  
You'd say at once, seeing the living face;  
But, finding here no jot of me, my friends,  
Laugh at the botching artist's misattempt.'

<sup>40</sup> *not far from the spot*: Lamb (1775-1834) lived at Crown Office Row till the tragedy—his sister Mary killed her mother in a fit of madness—alluded to here occurred in 1796.

LIBRARY OF  
EWING CHRISTIAN COLLEGE  
ALLAHABAD

## NOTES

<sup>41</sup> *Clarendon*: (1609-1674), author of *The True Historical Narrative of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, first printed in 1702-4. From the profits of this work, presented to the University of Oxford (of which Clarendon was Chancellor) by his heirs, the University Press named after him was built.

<sup>42</sup> *Whitelocke . . . Thurloe*: Balstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675), author of *Memorials*, a contemporary history; John Thurloe (1616-1668), Cromwell's secretary.

<sup>43</sup> *Baxter*: (1615-1691), leading Presbyterian divine and voluminous writer, who sided with the Parliamentarians in the Civil War.

<sup>44</sup> ' *propter paucissimas* ', etc.: 'because of the very slight acquaintance with persons of influence open to one who keeps to his house almost entirely—and that gladly—as I do.'

<sup>45</sup> *Salmasius*: (1588-1653), professor at Leyden, who was Milton's opponent in the wordy Latin duel of pamphlets on the subject. Salmasius's work was called the *Defensio Regia*; Milton replied with the *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*. The *Defensio Secunda* is referred to in the text *infra*.

<sup>46</sup> *hundred Jacobuses*: 'Jacobus' was the name given to a gold coin of the time of James I.

<sup>47</sup> *Mr. Dick*: the lunatic in Dickens's *David Copperfield*. He is perpetually engaged in drawing up a memorial of his own affairs, but can never complete it, because of the subject of 'King Charles's head' which keeps cropping up in it.

<sup>48</sup> *bill of complaint in Chancery*: a formal legal complaint sent through the civil court.

<sup>49</sup> *a poor sonnet*: the name of Milton's second wife was Catherine Woodcock; the reference is to Johnson's *Life*, §75.

## MILTON

<sup>50</sup> *a poem the world should not willingly let die* : ' I began thus far to assent . . . to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die ' (*The Reason of Church Government*, 1641, bk. ii).

<sup>51</sup> *Mr. Besant* : afterwards Sir Walter (1836-1901), defined the financial position of authors in his *The Pen and the Book* (1899).

<sup>52</sup> *Cleaveland and Flatman* : John Cle(a)veland (1613-1658) and Thomas Flatman (1637-1688), both very minor and prosaic poets.

<sup>53</sup> *fit and not fewer* : cf. *Paradise Lost*, vii, 30 :—

Still govern thou my song,  
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.

<sup>54</sup> *John Bright* : (1811-1889), the politician and orator, a very different type, the author means, from Mark Pattison's—the public man and the private scholar.

<sup>55</sup> *the French senator* : Edmond Scherer ; see Matthew Arnold's essay ' A French Critic on Milton ' in *Mixed Essays*, 1879 (previously printed in *Quarterly Review*, 1877).

## II. JONATHAN SWIFT

<sup>1</sup> *W. M. Thackeray* : (1811-1863), born in India, was educated at the Charterhouse and Cambridge. He practised law for a time, then took up drawing. But his occasional writings were more successful, particularly those contributed to *Punch*, and he gradually took to literature and the writing of novels. The present essay is taken from a series of lectures on *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*, delivered in 1851 and published two years



## NOTES

later. *Vanity Fair*, *Penicennis*, *Esmond*, *The Newcomes*, *The Virginians* are the most noteworthy of his novels.

<sup>2</sup> *Scott*: a memoir of Swift written by Sir Walter Scott appeared as a preface to the latter's edition of Swift's works in 1814.

<sup>3</sup> *Johnson*: who admitted him to his *Lives of the Poets*, concludes: 'In the Poetical Works of Dr. Swift there is not much upon which the critick can exercise his powers.'

<sup>4</sup> *Dr. Wilde*: *The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life*, by W. R. Wilde, 1849.

<sup>5</sup> *Fielding*: Henry (1707-1754), author of *Joseph Andrews* (1742), one of the first in time of English novels, *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Amelia* (1751). See also note 15.

<sup>6</sup> *blue riband*: part of the insignia of a Knight of the Garter.

<sup>7</sup> *Thus at the bar*, etc.: from *On the words 'Brother Protestants' and 'Fellow Christians'*, so familiarly used by the advocates for the refusal of the Test Act in Ireland. Bettsworth was sergeant-at-law of Dublin, a member of the Irish Parliament, and a frequent butt of Swift's satire. Henry Singleton, the learned lawyer, with whom the 'booby' is contrasted, later became Lord Chief Justice and Master of the Rolls.

<sup>8</sup> *Bolingbroke*: Henry St. John, first Viscount (1678-1751), parliamentary orator and writer. His deistic ideas are reflected in Pope's famous versified *Essay on Man*.

<sup>9</sup> *Macheath*: Captain Macheath is the highwayman hero of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728).

<sup>10</sup> *mitre and crozier*: representing the bishopric sought by Swift.

<sup>11</sup> *to point a moral or adorn a tale*: quoting Johnson in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (221) on Charles XII of Sweden.

# SWIFT

<sup>12</sup> *condottieri*: 'captains of mercenary soldiers'.

<sup>13</sup> *South Sea Bubble*: the South Sea Company was formed in 1711 for trade with Spanish America. Much rash speculation followed and the whole scheme collapsed in 1720. There are many references to this affair in Swift's poems.

<sup>14</sup> *at Copenhagen*: in 1801 the British fleet attacked Copenhagen, defeated the Danish fleet, and forced Denmark to withdraw from their support of the French.

<sup>15</sup> *Goldsmith . . . Steele*: Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74), author of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1762), *The Traveller* (1764), *The Goodnatur'd Man* (1768), etc. Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) contributed with Addison to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* and a good many comedies. Both men lived their lives in London.

<sup>16</sup> *Gulielmus Temple, Baronettus*: as his name and title would be officially Latinized.

<sup>17</sup> *Ciceronian majesty*: i.e. modelling his prose on that of Cicero. See note on Cicero, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> *Mild Dorothea*, etc.: Both these quotations are from Swift's verses *Occasioned by Sir William Temple's Late Illness and Recovery*, 1693.

<sup>19</sup> *moxa*: 'the down of a plant called mugwort, which used to be burnt over the skin in order to produce a blister.'

<sup>20</sup> *Teague*: nickname for an Irishman—the parson is, of course, Swift himself.

<sup>21</sup> *plates-bândes*: 'borders of flowers'.

<sup>22</sup> *Epicurus*, etc.: Epicurus, the Athenian philosopher (342-270 B.C.); Diogenes Laertius (third century A.D.), author of *Lives of the Philosophers*; Semiramis, the mythical queen of Assyria; the Hesperides were the nymphs who looked after the golden apples given as a wedding present to Hera on her marriage to Zeus—the garden was beyond the sea and guarded by the dragon, slain later by

## NOTES

Hercules; Strabo (first century B.C.), the famous Latin writer on geography; Pythagoras, Greek philosopher (sixth century B.C.).

<sup>23</sup> *Pope*: Alexander (1688-1744), the most influential poet of this period.

<sup>24</sup> *he breaks out*: the poem concludes as follows:—  
 Madness like this no fancy ever seized,  
 Still to be cheated, never to be pleased;  
 Since one false beam of joy in sickly minds  
 Is all the poor content delusion finds.—  
 There thy enchantment broke, and from this hour  
 I here renounce thy visionary power,  
 And since thy essence on my breath depends,  
 Thus with a puff the whole delusion ends.

<sup>25</sup> *Bishop Kennet*: White Kennet, Bishop of Peterborough (1660-1728), author of the *Compleat History of England*.

<sup>26</sup> *Tale of a Tub*: Swift's prose allegorical satire (1696) of the Roman, Anglican and Calvinist churches.

<sup>27</sup> *Gay*: John (1685-1732) belonged to the same circle. See note to *Macheath* above.

<sup>28</sup> *Samson with a bone in his hand*: see the Book of Judges xv. 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Modest Proposal*: this was a pamphlet, pointing satirically to the exploiting of Ireland by England; its full title was 'A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of Poor People from being a Burden to their Parents or the Country'. It may be held that Thackeray here misses the reason for Swift's relish of his allegory.

<sup>30</sup> *ragoût*: rehash or stew.

<sup>31</sup> 'roasting': making sport of.

<sup>32</sup> *Mr. Macaulay*: see the Essay on Addison. The quotation is from Addison's Latin poem on the Battle of the Cranes and the Pygmies.

## SWIFT

33 'the mast of some great a(m)piral': the reference is to *Paradise Lost*, i, 294.

34 the unpronounceable country: the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels* describes the country of the Houyhnhnms, the thinking horses, and the Yahoos.

35 A remarkable story: see Scott's *Life*, vol. I, 234.

36 Delany: Dr. Patrick Delany, the friend of Swift, whose wife's *Autobiography* is much used by students of eighteenth century English life.

37 Archbishop King: (1650-1729) of Dublin.

38 Drapier Bickerstaff: Isaac Bickerstaff and Drapier (=Draper) were pen names assumed by Swift.

39 cries of remorse and love: the lines are:—

When on my sickly couch I lay,  
Impatient both of night and day,  
And groaning in unmanly strains,  
Called every power to ease my pains,  
Then Stella ran to my relief,  
With cheerful face and inward grief,  
And though by Heaven's severe decree  
She suffers hourly more than me,  
No cruel master could require  
From slaves employed for daily hire,  
What Stella, by her friendship warmed,  
With vigour and delight performed.  
Now, with a soft and silent tread,  
Unheard she moves about my bed:  
My sinking spirits now supplies  
With cordials in her hands and eyes.  
Best pattern of true friends! beware  
You pay too dearly for your care  
If, while your tenderness secures  
My life, it must endanger yours:

## NOTES

For such a fool was never found  
Who pulled a palace to the ground,  
Only to have the ruins made  
Materials for a house decayed.

<sup>40</sup> *amo, amas, amavi* : ' I love, thou lovest, I have loved ', parts of the first conjugation learnt by beginners in Latin.

<sup>41</sup> *Cadenus and Vanessa* : the title of Swift's poem, 1713. Cadenus=Decanius=Dean, i.e. Swift himself; Vanessa was Swift's pet name for Esther Vanhomrigh.

<sup>42</sup> *Ariadne* : who was forsaken by Theseus on the island of Naxos.

<sup>43</sup> *Sheridan* : Thomas (1687-1738), grandfather of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the dramatist and author of *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*.

## III. DAVID HUME

<sup>1</sup> *Lytton Strachey* : (1880-1932), rose to fame on the publication of *Eminent Victorians* (1918), in the preface of which he explains his biographical method, exploring the suggestive 'detail', and evading the unsuggestive all-inclusive chronicle style of narration. His *Life of Queen Victoria* (1921), *Books and Characters* (1922), *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), and *Portraits in Miniature* (1931) from which this essay on Hume is taken, are his other important works.

<sup>2</sup> *Descartes* : René (1596-1650), French mathematician, physicist and philosopher, founder of the 'Cartesian' school of philosophy, and author of the famous phrase *cogito, ergo sum*, 'I think, therefore I am.' This occurs in his chief work, *Le Discours de la Méthode* (1637).

<sup>3</sup> *Locke* : John (1632-1704). His principal philosophical work is the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

<sup>4</sup> *Faculty of Advocates*: the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, now the National Library of Scotland, is one of the libraries that receive a copy of all books published in Great Britain. It was presented to the nation by the Scottish Faculty of Advocates.

<sup>5</sup> *Commines* . . . *Clarendon* . . . *Bossuet* . . . *Montesquieu*: Philippe de Commynes (1445-1509), chronicler of the reigns of Louis XI and Charles VIII; Clarendon: see note above, p. 150; Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), whose *Discourse on Universal History* traces the hand of God in the current of human affairs; Charles Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu (1689-1755), political philosopher, author of the famous *Persian Letters*.

<sup>6</sup> *Voltaire*: (1694-1778) condemned organized systems of religion; his sceptical philosophy had great influence on European thought. His real name was François Marie Arouet.

<sup>7</sup> *O altitudo!*: Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), editor of *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1850). The Latin word ('O Sublimity') suggests the apostrophizing hero-worshipping style of treating his subject. See Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, i, ix.

<sup>8</sup> *philosophiés*: or *philosophes*, the eighteenth century French school of sceptical writers.

<sup>9</sup> *de rigueur*: the correct, the fashionable, thing.

<sup>10</sup> *charade*: a piece of amateur acting. The story is told by Madame d'Epinay.

<sup>11</sup> 'Eh bien,' etc.: 'Well, well, ladies, there you are then!'

<sup>12</sup> *chargé d'affaires*: a sort of deputy or under-ambassador.

<sup>13</sup> *Castle rock*: in Edinburgh.

<sup>14</sup> *Essay on Miracles*: included in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Here Hume 'argues that the evidence for miracles is necessarily inferior to the

## NOTES

evidence for the "laws of nature" established by uniform experience of which they are a violation'.

<sup>15</sup> 'the Belief': the Apostles' Creed.

<sup>16</sup> *Addisonian dotting of death-bed* i's: calling his stepson to his death-bed, Addison is reported to have said: 'See in what peace a Christian can die.'

<sup>17</sup> *Adam Smith*: (1723-1790), author of the famous *Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), the first comprehensive study of political economy. Smith edited Hume's *Autobiography*.

<sup>18</sup> *Charon*: ferryman across the rivers of death of the souls of the dead; Lucian (2nd cent. A.D.), Greek satirist, author of *Dialogues of the Dead*.

<sup>19</sup> *Comtesse de Boufflers*: remembered occasionally as the friend of the Prince of Conti. She had corresponded with Hume for two years before they met in Paris.

## IV. THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY

<sup>1</sup> *Charles Williams*: (1886- ), poet, novelist and biographer, one of the most brilliant all-round men of letters of the younger (if not the youngest) generation. His poems are included in the volumes *Conformity* (1917), *Divorce* (1920), *Windows of Night* (1924). *The English Poetic Mind* (1932) is an essay in literary criticism, and his two biographical studies *Shakespeare* (with Sir Edmund Chambers) and *Bacon*, appeared during the current year (1933).

<sup>2</sup> 'ten thousand French': see *Henry V*, IV, viii, 85 seq.

<sup>3</sup> *Hannah More*: poetess and religious writer, 1745-1833.

<sup>4</sup> 'cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark': see Deuteronomy xxvii. 17.

<sup>5</sup> 'Clapham sect': a religious and humanitarian group, living at Clapham, then a village near London; of great influence in the abolition of the slave traffic.



## MACAULAY

<sup>6</sup> *Holland House*: the home of the Fox family in Kensington. The Lord Holland here mentioned, 1773-1840, was known as a patron of literature. See Macaulay's Essay.

<sup>7</sup> *a letter to his sister*: Hannah, dated 1 June 1831.

<sup>8</sup> *But mark what ills*, etc.: from Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749).

<sup>9</sup> *Mill's India* . . . *Sismondi's History of France* . . . *Biographia Britannica: The History of India* by James Mill, father of the more celebrated John Stuart Mill, published in 1818; Jean Charles Sismondi (1773-1842), French historian; the *Biographia Britannica* had first appeared in 1747-66, the predecessor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>10</sup> *secular*: everlasting.

<sup>11</sup> *Clarissa Harlowe*: the most famous novel (published 1747-8) of Samuel Richardson (1689-1761).

<sup>12</sup> *the death of Dundee*: John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee (1649?-1689) was killed at Killiecrankie, in the victory which he won for James II. The battle is described in chap. xiii of the *History*.

<sup>13</sup> *Leigh Hunt*: James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), poet, essayist, and a friend of Shelley and Keats.

<sup>14</sup> *Journal*: Macaulay's own diary which he kept fully and carefully.

<sup>15</sup> *Penn*: William Penn (1644-1718), Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania. The Quakers objected to Macaulay's presentation of him in chap. v of the *History*.

<sup>16</sup> *Behemoth*: see Job xl. 15; the name of some monstrous animal generally supposed to be the hippopotamus.

<sup>17</sup> *Madame Tussaud*: an exhibition of waxworks, brought to London in 1800 by Marie Tussaud (1760-1850), and still one of the metropolitan shows.

<sup>18</sup> *Wordsworth*: who offers such an utter contrast (appreciated or not by the 'Yankee') to Macaulay among men of letters.

## NOTES

<sup>19</sup> *Arnold was scornful of the Lays*, etc.: see the *Last Words on translating Homer*, where he speaks of the 'ring of false metal' in the *Lays*.

<sup>20</sup> *Louis the Sun-King*: Louis XIV of France, called *Le Roi Soleil*. The reference is to chap. xxv of the *History*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ah ha!* among the trumpets: see Job xxxix. 25.

### V. RICHARD COBDEN

<sup>1</sup> *J. L. Hammond*: (1872- ), journalist, distinguished economist and man of letters. His publications include *Charles James Fox* (1903), *The Village Labourer 1760-1832*, *The Town Labourer 1760-1832*, etc., in collaboration with his wife, *Lord Shaftesbury* (1923), etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Camden Town*: a northern suburb of London.

<sup>3</sup> *Morley*: John, first Viscount (1838-1923), historian and scholar; see note 14 below.

<sup>4</sup> *the Manchester School*: the name given to the free trade party led by Cobden and Bright.

<sup>5</sup> *Antonines*: Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus were emperors of Rome 138-161 and 161-180 A.D. respectively. Two of the noblest princes that ever reigned.

<sup>6</sup> *more like Herodotus*, etc.: Herodotus (484-424 B.C.), the much travelled Greek historian; Strabo (b. circ. 54 B.C.); see note above, p. 154; Messrs. Marshall & Snelgrove and Messrs. Swan & Edgar are the names of two of the largest of London's universal stores.

<sup>7</sup> *like Odysseus*: or Ulysses. His adventures are recounted in Homer's *Odyssey*. Cf. Tennyson's *Ulysses*.

<sup>8</sup> *Schliemann's discoveries*: Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890), the German archaeologist who excavated Troy (1870-1882).

## COBDEN

<sup>9</sup> *Golden cities*, etc.: a quotation (but read *wilds* for *hills*) from Wordsworth, *Prelude*, vii, 83.

<sup>10</sup> *Stanhope* . . . *Castlereagh*: Philip Dormer, fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773); Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (1769-1822), Foreign Secretary from 1812 to 1822.

<sup>11</sup> *the financial storm of 1826*: 'The speculations of the year 1825 have been compared to the South Sea Bubble of 1720. At last, on 5 December 1825, the great banking house of Pole became insolvent, and dragged nearly a hundred banks down in its ruin. Throughout 1826 the panic went on.'—R. B. Mowat, *A New History of Great Britain*, p. 675.

<sup>12</sup> *calico printer*: producer of patterns on calico.

<sup>13</sup> *Covent Garden*: the famous London theatre, was first opened in 1732.

<sup>14</sup> *Lord Morley tells us*: in his *Life of Richard Cobden* (1881).

<sup>15</sup> *Grote was a banker*: George Grote (1794-1871), the historian.

<sup>16</sup> *Marco Polo or Jonas Hanway*: Marco Polo (1254-1324), the Venetian traveller; Jonas Hanway (1712-1786), traveller and philanthropist.

<sup>17</sup> *Corn Laws*: restricting the importation of foreign corn, were repealed by Peel in 1846 following the agitation of Bright and Cobden and their followers.

<sup>18</sup> *Fox*: Charles James (1749-1806), the great statesman, had a remarkable passion for gambling.

<sup>19</sup> *Brooks's*: a club in Pall Mall, a noted gambling centre in eighteenth century London.

<sup>20</sup> *threw his fortune into the Mississippi*: cf. 'Illinois', above. Cobden invested a great deal of his money in various schemes for developing trade, notably by rail (the Illinois Central Railway, e.g.) and river, in America.

## NOTES

<sup>21</sup> *Hook*: Walter Farquhar Hook (1798-1875), Vicar of Leeds and Dean of Chichester.

<sup>22</sup> *Cicero and Seneca*: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Roman statesman, orator and writer; Lucius Annaeus Seneca (d. A.D. 65), philosopher and tutor to the emperor Nero.

<sup>23</sup> *as Dickens saw*: cf. his 'Sunday under Three Heads' in *Reprinted Pieces*.

<sup>24</sup> *Tivoli Gardens*: we have not been able to trace any other reference to these (presumably) Berlin beer-gardens.

<sup>25</sup> *Macaulay*: cf. Mr. Charles Williams's essay, p. 87, § 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Southey's pessimism*: see Macaulay's essay 'Southey's Colloquies on Society', 1830.

<sup>27</sup> *South Sea Bubble crash*: see note p. 153.

<sup>28</sup> *the Parthenon*: the temple of Athene at Athens.

<sup>29</sup> *Michelangelo or Rembrandt*: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Italian painter, sculptor and poet; Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt (1607-1669), Dutch painter.

<sup>30</sup> *Charlotte Brontë's neighbours, as described by Mrs. Gaskell*: see Mrs. Gaskell (1810-1865, the novelist), *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857).

<sup>31</sup> *Cosmo de' Medici*: Cosimo (1389-1464), ruler of Florence and patron of the arts.

<sup>32</sup> *Herodes Atticus*: (c. 104-180), a Greek rhetorician, who spent his great wealth in beautifying Athens.

<sup>33</sup> *mystical poetry of the thirteenth century*: the work of Dante (1265-1321) may be taken as a simple example.

<sup>34</sup> *the discoveries of Columbus*: Christopher Columbus (circ. 1445-1506), the discoverer of America, made his first voyage in 1492.

<sup>35</sup> *the savage days of Mithridates*: the name of several kings of Pontus, who attacked the Greeks by sea and land.

<sup>36</sup> *Carlyle's famous phrase*: The phrase is to be found attributed to Carlyle in Lord Houghton's *Commonplace Book* printed in T. W. Reid, *Life of Lord Houghton*,

## STEVENSON

I, 436 :— ' Cobden is an inspired bagman, who believes in a calico millennium. He is always praising America to me. I said to him, " What have the Americans done but beget, with unexampled rapidity, twenty millions of the greatest bores on the face of the earth ? " ' Richard Monckton Milnes, first Baron Houghton was born in 1809 and died in 1885.

<sup>37</sup> *Isocrates and Cicero, Epaminondas and Scipio* : Isocrates (436-338 B.C.), patriot and orator of Athens; Cicero, see note above, p. 162 ; Epaminondas, the upright Theban statesman and soldier (fl. c. 375 B.C.) ; Scipio (237-183? B.C.), Roman conqueror of Spain and of Hannibal.

<sup>38</sup> *in the hour when victory*, etc. : i.e. after the conclusion of the recent Great War. The other of ' the two Englishmen ' referred to is Gladstone. ' What Dante was to Gladstone, Adam Smith was to Cobden. ' .

## VI. ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

<sup>1</sup> *Edmund Gosse* : Sir (1849-1928), from 1884-1890 Clark lecturer in English literature at the University of Cambridge and from 1904-1914 Librarian to the House of Lords. He was the author of biographies of Donne, Gray, Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, Congreve, Swinburne, and Ibsen. He was also a well-known poet. The present essay is from the collection *Critical Kit-Cats* (1896).

<sup>2</sup> *Professor Blackie* . . . *Bough* : John Stuart Blackie (1809-1895) ; Bough was born in 1822.

<sup>3</sup> *keenings* : strictly, the lament for the dead.

<sup>4</sup> *Recollections* . . . *Andrew Lang* : (1844-1912), scholar, literary critic and poet.

<sup>5</sup> *John Addington Symonds* : (1840-1893), author of the *History of the Renaissance in Italy*, a well-known scholar and literary critic.

## NOTES

<sup>6</sup> *Sidney Colvin* : Sir (1845-1927), noted literary and art critic, edited the 'Edinburgh' edition of R. L. Stevenson's works.

<sup>7</sup> *as Constance does of Arthur* : see Shakespeare, *King John*, III, iv, 81 : 'There was not such a gracious creature born.'

<sup>8</sup> *if ever there were an altruist* : This continued to be his characteristic to the last. Thus he described an interview he had in Sydney with some man formerly connected with the "black-birding" [kidnapping for slavery] trade, by saying : "He was very shy at first, and it was not till I told him of a good many of my escapades that I could get him to thaw, and then he poured it all out. I have always found that the best way of getting people to be confidential." —Author's note.

<sup>9</sup> *Academe or Mouseion* : Academe (Academy) was the grove near Athens near which Plato opened his school of philosophy. A Mouseion (Latin, *museum*) meant originally 'a temple of the Muses'.

<sup>10</sup> *Leslie Stephen* : Sir (1832-1904), editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>11</sup> *Swinburne's Queen-Mother and Rosamond* : Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), the famous poet. *The Queen Mother. Rosamund. Two Plays*, his first publication (1860) was generally ignored.

<sup>12</sup> *The Amateur Emigrant and Across the Plains* : *Across the Plains* was published in 1892 ; *The Amateur Emigrant* is included in vol. III of the 'Edinburgh' edition of his works.

<sup>13</sup> *Ouida* : pseudonym of Marie Louise de la Ramée (1839-1908), author of *Under Two Flags* and many other well-known novels. Ouida is an excellent story-teller, fluent in style if doubtful occasionally in her portrayal of fact.

<sup>14</sup> *Mr. Walter Pollock* . . . *Mr. Henley* : Walter Herries Pollock (1850-1926) edited the *Saturday Review*

## STEVENSON

from 1883 to 1894; William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), poet, essayist and editor, was a great friend of R.L.S. and collaborated with him in the production of several plays.

<sup>15</sup> *Hazlitt*: William (1778-1830), the famous essayist, author of *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817-1818), *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818-1819), etc.

<sup>16</sup> *Liber Amoris*: published in 1823, in which a sordid love affair is related.

<sup>17</sup> *Mr. Austin Dobson, Mr. Saintsbury*: Henry Austin Dobson (1840-1921), poet and literary critic, chiefly of eighteenth century English literature. George Edward Bateman Saintsbury (1845-1932), from 1895-1915 professor of rhetoric and English literature at Edinburgh University. Probably the most widely read (in both senses) of all historians of literature.

<sup>18</sup> *Jean Cavalier*: (c. 1680-1740), the famous chief of the Camisards, French protestants persecuted by Louis XIV. See Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey, The Country of the Camisards*.

<sup>19</sup> *John Morley*: see note above, p. 160. Lord Morley was editor of the 'English Men of Letters' Series.

<sup>20</sup> *Treasure Island*: this romance, published in 1883, made Stevenson famous. It still remains one of the best, if not the best, of stories for boys ever written.

<sup>21</sup> *Mr. Osbourne*: Lloyd Osbourne collaborated with Stevenson in *The Wrong Box* (1889), *The Wrecker* (1892) and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894).

<sup>22</sup> *Grub Street*: the name given to any haunt of hack-writers.

<sup>23</sup> *Vallombrosa*: see Milton, *Paradise Lost*, i, 303.

<sup>24</sup> *mistral*: the north west wind which blows in regions near the Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>25</sup> *Underwoods*: the collection of Stevenson's poems published in 1887. The title was borrowed from Ben Jonson.



## NOTES

<sup>26</sup> *Gilder*: Richard Watson Gilder (1844-1909) American editor and poet.

<sup>27</sup> *Joseph Pennell*: (d. 1926), author of *The Life of James McNeile Whistler*, 1907.

<sup>28</sup> *he had seen Death in the cave*: Gosse is presumably alluding to the cave of Despair described in that amazingly beautiful ('Death is the end of woes: die soone, O faeries sonne') canto of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, bk. I, canto ix.

The sight whereof so throughly him dismaid,  
That nought but Death before his eyes he saw.

(stanza 130).

<sup>29</sup> '*Pulvis et Umbra*': One of the best-known of Stevenson's essays, included in *Across the Plains*.

<sup>30</sup> *his grandfather*: Robert Stevenson (1772-1850), engineer to the Board of Northern Lighthouses, who built, besides other lighthouses, that on the Bell Rock. See R. L. Stevenson's *Records of a Family of Engineers* (first published posthumously).

<sup>31</sup> *Frank R. Stockton*: (1834-1902), American writer of humorous fiction. His short story *The Lady or the Tiger* is well known.

<sup>32</sup> *Thomas Hyke* . . . *Negative Gravity*: both these tales appear in Stockton's *The Christian Wreck and other Stories*, 1886. 'Ludgate Hill' (p. 140) presumably alludes to yet another story, but this we have failed to identify.

<sup>33</sup> *Mr. Watts*: George Frederic (1817-1904), perhaps most famous for his symbolic pictures.

<sup>34</sup> *chez Todgers, Pecksniff street*: (*chez*=at the house of) Todgers is the boarding house described in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in which novel Mr. Pecksniff is also to be found.

<sup>35</sup> *Mr. Hardy's beautiful romance, The Woodlanders*: Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), the famous novelist and poet. *The Woodlanders* appeared in 1887.

<sup>36</sup> *Prince Otto*: published in 1885.

